

HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS WITH A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

by

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FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE READER

SCOPE OF THE DISSERTATION

For this master's dissertation of limited scope (50% of the total master's degree) the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology prescribes an article format. This format involves four chapters – an introductory and literature chapter, followed by a research article (presented as chapter 3) and ending with a conclusion, limitations or recommendations chapter. For this dissertation, the department recommends a boundary of approximately 60 to 80 pages.

TECHNICAL AND REFERENCE STYLE

In this dissertation I have chosen the publication guidelines of the American Psychology Association to structure my dissertation and article. Therefore, the APA style was followed in the technical editing and referencing.

DECLARATION

I, Cameron Ronald Duffton, student number 47073942, declare that this dissertation, titled "Human Resource Practitioners' Experiences of Engagement Interventions within a Financial institution", is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or have quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

DATE

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I would like to firstly thank my wife, Juliet, and my family for helping me through this journey and for allowing me the time necessary to complete this journey.

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SUMMARY

HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS WITH A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

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The aim of this study was to explore human resources (HR) practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution. A qualitative research approach was followed which was informed by the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm. Semi-structured interviews were used. The findings indicated that HR practitioners play a critical role in enhancing engagement in organisations through the implementation of effective engagement interventions. The HR practitioners often thought of themselves as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when implementing engagement interventions. The majority of the HR practitioners did understand engagement, their role in the implementation of engagement interventions and the tools used to assess engagement. However, the findings did indicate that some of the HR practitioners within this study had limited knowledge of engagement, engagement interventions and the tools used to implement engagement. The findings also indicated that the implementation of an engagement intervention should be a collaborative process between employer and employee, with the support of top management to ensure the success of the engagement intervention. Engagement interventions were considered to be predominantly positive and successful by most of the participants. However, it was noted by participants that if there is no follow-through on the implementation of the engagement interventions it can become negative.

KEY TERMS

Retention, performance, Industrial psychologist, hermeneutic phenomenology, employee role, facilitator, engagement tools

CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

This dissertation focused on human resource practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution. Chapter 1 contains the background and motivation, the problem statement, the aims, paradigm perspective, research design and method as well as the chapter layout.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Engagement seems to be a buzzword these days (Richman, 2006). Business journals, conference agendas, and workplace research consistently cry a message that engagement is critical for business success. But according to recent surveys only a fraction of the United States (US) population is highly engaged (Richman, 2006). Gallup estimates that approximately 26% of the US population is engaged. Recent research shows that knowing how to create and sustain engagement within organisations is the key to total rewards strategies (Richman, 2006). Today, increased focus is put on engagement due to turbulent times and changes, organisational churn and dramatic cost cutting (Richman, 2006). Globalization, the speed of change, and ambiguity in the business context demands high levels of fitness to facilitate organisational survival (Pech & Slade, 2006). Pech and Slade (2006) stated that no organisation can afford not to use its employees' energy to full advantage. Engagement is something organisations either enhance or undermine; it is influenced by management practices and features such as personality and demographics (Richman, 2006). So if a company is not intentionally trying to increase organisational engagement and commitment, chances are that it is minimizing or even crushing it.

Further it was found that engagement is a critical element of this underlying energy. The payoff of an energized workforce is enormous. It can lead to increased productivity, retention, engagement and reduced turnover (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). However, it has been reported in research that engagement is on the decline and there is increased disengagement among employees today (Richman, 2006). This could be because many engagement interventions are failing (Jorgensen, 2006). In many organisations human resources (HR) practitioners are responsible for the implementation of engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). In light of the latter, possible reasons why disengagement is increasing (Richman, 2006) and interventions structured around engagement are failing (Jorgensen, 2006) may be that HR practitioners do not understand the concept of engagement and how to implement an engagement intervention effectively. This study aims to explore what HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions are, and this in turn may provide insight into why interventions structured around engagement are failing or succeeding in the business world today.

Chapter 1 contains the background and motivation, the problem statement, the aims, paradigm perspective, research design and method as well as the chapter layout.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

The insurance industry has boomed since the late 19th century (Chan, 2002), which has resulted in increased rivalry and competitiveness between employees and organisations (Lai, Chan, Ko, & Boey, 2000). The financial industry is also experiencing this increased rivalry and competitiveness. Increased demands from world-wide economic conditions are forcing organisations to make rapid changes to their workforce (Coetzer & Rothman, 2007). Many organisations are downsizing, restructuring and outsourcing and this impacts heavily on employees' work demands and obligations (Kickul & Posig, 2001). This in turn results in an organisation's workforce experiencing increased stress, insecurity, alienation, misunderstandings and under-evaluation. When an employee can no longer handle these pressures and is feeling totally overwhelmed with stress, he or she is less likely to be engaged at work.

An engaged workforce contributes significantly to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Companies with engaged employees have improved customer satisfaction, better productivity, greater profitability and lower staff turnover than companies whose employees are not engaged in their work (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). It becomes imperative that leaders determine what organisational factors contribute to engagement and they must put measures in place to enhance these factors on a group and individual level (Havenga, Stanz, Visagie, & Karin, 2011). Some of the factors aimed at employee engagement can significantly increase engagement and in turn this can have a measurable impact on HR variables such as retention and staff illness.

The workplace has changed significantly over the past decade in order to survive in a very competitive global economy (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). According to Kahn (1990) work engagement refers to expression of oneself through work and other employee-role activities. Many researchers claim that engagement predicts employee outcomes, financial performance and organisational success (Bates, 2004; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Richman, 2006). At the same time engagement has shown to be on the decline (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). It has been reported that the majority of workers are not fully engaged in the US, which has led to an engagement gap that is costing US businesses around \$300 billion a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004).

An analysis by Harter et al. (2002) of business-unit level relationships among engagement, employee satisfaction and business results found that engagement is linked directly to employee retention, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer sales and profitability. The Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) (2004) completed a study on engagement levels of over 50 000 employees across the world and found that employees who are committed perform up to 20% better and are 87% less likely to leave the organisation. The latter indicates the significance of engagement to organisational performance (Havenga et al., 2011). It is important for managers to prioritise engagement, given that disengagement is central to the problem of workers' lack of commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Although the literature shows that engaged employees are more productive on most available organisational measures (Richman, 2006), it is conservatively estimated that less than 30 percent of the global workforce is engaged (Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006). In addition to this, less than 20 percent of employees have confidence in their manager's ability to engage them (Czarnowsky, 2008). Not surprisingly, employee engagement is reported to be declining worldwide, which is cause for much concern (Bates, 2004).

Engagement has more recently been considered in the context of human resource development (HRD) (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). For example, managerial training courses are now being tailored to increase levels of engagement (Gebauer & Lowman, 2008). Opportunities provided through learning have also been considered as antecedents of engagement (Czarnowsky, 2008). As a result of this HRD professionals or practitioners are taking cognizance of how the levels of engagement can be actively and passively increased by developing talent (Fairlie, 2011).

There is a discrepancy between the level of engagement and the perceived importance of engagement in organisations today (Czarnowsky, 2008). This discrepancy presents a significant opportunity for HR practitioners, HRD professionals and researchers to develop practical strategies and research agendas towards the emerging concept of employee engagement (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). As more and more organisational leaders are embracing engagement, they are increasingly looking towards HR practitioners and HRD professionals to develop and support strategies that facilitate engagement – encouraging cultures (Vance, 2006). However there has been minimal academic research on the HR practitioners' and employees' experiences of being engaged (Kahn, 1990) or how engagement affects employees' experiences of their work and their work performance (Shuck et al., 2011). For example, well-cited studies from scholars such as Saks (2006) and Harter et al. (2002) conceptualize engagement as a positive psychological construct, but do not explore what engagement is from an employee's perspective (Shuck et al., 2011). Unfortunately the lack of research on employees' experiences of engagement, and the documented

declining levels of engagement, comes at a time when organisations world-wide are looking for ways to enhance engagement (Gebauer & Lowman, 2008).

Organisational leaders are focusing on more productive ways to create an engaged workforce, yet 85% of employees doubt their leader's knowledge about how to develop engagement at work (Czarnowsky, 2008). Engagement has developed an impressive HR following (Shuck & Reio, 2011). The responsibility of leading organisational change through engagement often lies with the HRD (human resources development) community and practitioners (Shuck & Reio, 2011). It seems that now more than ever, engagement has become a strategic organisational imperative (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Organisations are progressively looking for ways to engage their employees and are increasingly looking at HR practitioners for understanding and meaning on how to keep employees engaged (Gebauer & Lowman, 2008).

Wollard (2011) says that in the years to come HR practitioners and researchers have great challenges and opportunities in bettering engagement within their organisations. Strategic HRD should contribute to an organisation's competitive advantage by enhancing unique capabilities and skills of its workforce in a specific way that is difficult for its competitors to imitate (Garavan, 2007). Strategic HRD must focus on evaluating the linkages among organisational strategies, policies and practices and HRD systems. HRD should also incorporate the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, and must focus on contributions at multiple levels of analysis (Garavan, 2007).

In a study conducted by Shuck et al. (2011) it was suggested that HRD practitioners could work to improve and build upon employee factors by providing employees on all levels opportunities for growth and learning (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). They can do so by setting a foundation for a culture of engagement and by providing the tools and resources needed for employees' managers to support their growth towards engagement.

Engagement has implication for all areas of HRD practice such as training and organisational learning, organisational development, career development, strategic change processes and performance management (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). HRD practitioners need to develop their knowledge of engagement and engagement interventions in order to be able to separate sales pitches from the truth. Practitioners who learn how to differentiate between other practitioners' ideas, well researched information and well wrapped sales pitches will be far more effective in enhancing engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

It was found by Bakker and Geurts (2004) that for employees to avoid an element such as exhaustion, job demands have to be reduced or redesigned by means of interventions. From a

pathogenic, as well as a fortogenic perspective, work engagement and burnout are specific areas for interventions and research (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The purpose of an intervention is the most important element in intervention research and is aimed at generating knowledge and evaluations (Burke, 2005).

For interventions to make a real contribution, both individual and organisational participation are important (Le Fevre, Kolt, & Matheny, 2006). It was also found that few studies conducted on interventions related to engagement have shown significant improvements in employee motivation and satisfaction levels, and little improvement in productivity (Jorgensen, 2006). It becomes imperative for leaders to determine which organisational factors contribute to engagement in the workplace and then to enhance these factors both on a group and individual level (Havenga et al., 2011). Some approaches can significantly improve engagement and this can result in a measurable impact on HR variables such as retention and staff illness (Havenga et al., 2011). Wider impacts include better client service, increased satisfaction levels and increased profitability (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Havenga et al., 2011).

As an HR practitioner and an Industrial psychologist in training I have found this research study of particular interest. I noticed in the financial institution where I work (the organisation this study is conducted on) that the engagement survey (Employee Attitudinal Survey) indicated a decrease in the level of overall engagement from 2013 to 2014 from a score of 65% to a score of 61%. The reason this interests me is the fact that a number of workshops were done with employer and employee in order to 'co-create' (employee and employer both contributed) engagement interventions to address the low-scoring areas of engagement in the organisation. Several engagement interventions were implemented from remuneration workshops, to career development strategies, to the introduction of better short-term incentives and management interventions (upskilling of managers in the way they treated their staff). Despite all of these engagement interventions the overall engagement score still decreased, which is of great concern to the organisation and to me as an employee and HR practitioner.

Further to this, the HR practitioners at this financial institution played a big role in the facilitation and development of these engagement interventions. The present study, by exploring the HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions, may provide insight into why engagement interventions may be unsuccessful or successful in the organisation, as their role as HR practitioner is a major determining factor in the success of an engagement intervention and ultimately in bettering engagement in the organisation.

In literature it is stated that it is one thing to get the conceptualisation of engagement and

engagement interventions right, and a completely different thing to get the operationalization correct (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Most engagement measures have failed to get the conceptualisation of engagement correct, so measurement of engagement is incorrectly done (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In the world of practice there have been measures of what we have called conditions of engagement labelled as measures of engagement, and many measures that for years have been indicators of employee opinions have been relabelled as indicants of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

This research will provide an insight into how HR practitioners experience engagement and engagement interventions. Additional to the latter, HR practitioners play a significant role in enhancing engagement, and therefore it is vital that HR practitioners who are implementing current engagement interventions and strategies understand if these engagement interventions are achieving the desired results, which is to enhance engagement within the organisation.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences HR practitioners have of engagement interventions within a financial institution. At this stage in the research, engagement will be defined as the simultaneous employment and expression of an employee's preferred self in task behaviours that promote personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), connection to work and others, and active performance roles (Kahn, 1990).

A study was conducted by Havenga et al. (2011), the objective of which was to determine if there was a difference in engagement before and after a business and culture intervention took place in the workplace. The results showed that there was no statistical significant difference between the mean employee engagement before and after the business and culture intervention. It was established that the interventions failed. This research is just one case of many where interventions structured around engagement are failing. I experienced a similar finding as an HR practitioner and an Industrial psychologist in training in that the engagement survey (Employee Attitudinal Survey) used in my organisation indicated a decrease in the level of overall engagement from 2013 to 2014 from a score of 65% to a score of 61%. Even though several workshops were done with employer and employee in order to 'co-create' (employee and employer both contributed) engagement interventions to address the low-scoring areas of engagement in the organisation, engagement ultimately decreased. Further to this the HR practitioners played a significant role in the facilitation and development of these engagement interventions, so it would be of great importance that I explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions in order to obtain greater insight

into why these interventions did not achieve the desired outcome, and to get insight into what engagement interventions can lead to greater success through the experiences of an HR practitioner.

A similar study conducted by Jorgensen (2006) focused on interventions that were implemented to address the levels of engagement and burnout of SAPS (South African Police Service) members. The interventions consisted of a set of structured activities that should lead to organisational improvement and individual development. The pre- and post-measurement also showed no significant difference in the work-related well-being and engagement of the SAPS members, hence the intervention did not achieve the desired outcome. This further provides evidence that it is important to determine what HR practitioners' experiences of engagement are, as they are often responsible for implementation of engagement strategies and interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

HR practitioners often look to scholars for tested and valid strategies on how to develop an engaged workforce, but they are increasingly met with a gap in research on how to do this (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Hence the rapid increase in organisational leaders' interest in engagement as well as the tried-and-tested answers about how to enhance engagement has led inevitably to a gap in theory, practice and scholarship (Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt, & Diehl, 2009). The responsibility lies with HRD practitioners to lead organisational change efforts to develop engagement (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Although the information gap presents a challenge for HR practitioners, it also presents a significant opportunity to conceptualise, situate and define engagement in the HR field (Shuck & Reio, 2011). The gap in knowledge also presents a challenge and opportunity for industrial and organisational (I/O) psychologists, as in many organisations I/O psychologists act as HR practitioners in their daily activities (Barnard & Fourie, 2007). I/O psychologists are in many cases seen as leaders in their organisations and as role models for happiness and change within an organisation (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). To develop and support interventions and cultures that can create optimal conditions for engagement to develop, it is of vital importance that HR practitioners, I/O psychologists and researchers understand the nature of engagement and its antecedents and subsequent outcomes (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

As evident in the discussion above, HR practices and HR practitioners play a significant role in enhancing engagement interventions, and therefore it is vital that HR practitioners who are implementing engagement interventions and strategies understand if these engagement interventions are achieving the desired results, which is to enhance engagement, or whether their experiences are contributing to unsuccessful engagement interventions. By exploring HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution, especially in the South African context, this study may provide insight into engagement interventions and why some

interventions are succeeding and why some interventions are not achieving the desired results. Further to this, there is a lack of research into HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution, especially in the South African context, and this necessitates the present study. By exploring HR practitioners' experiences of engagement it may offer insight into why interventions are succeeding or failing.

To address the above, the research question of this study is:

- What are HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions in a financial institution?

1.4. RESEARCH AIMS

The general aim and specific aim are discussed below.

1.4.1. General aim

This general aim of this research is to explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

1.4.2 Specific aims

The specific aims relating to the literature review were the following:

- To conceptualise engagement;
- To conceptualise engagement interventions;
- To conceptualise an HR practitioner's role with engagement; and
- To explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions specifically within an financial institution by conducting a review of recent literature.

The specific aims relating to the interpretative study were the following:

- To gain a better understanding as to how HR practitioners experience engagement interventions within a financial institution;
- To provide possible insight as to why current interventions structured around engagement are successful or failing, based on an HR practitioner's experience;

- To make recommendations on how to better implement engagement interventions in order to increase the likelihood of success when implementing engagement interventions in organisations;
- To make recommendations for further research about HR practitioners' and I/O psychologists' experiences of engagement interventions.

1.5. THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

A paradigm is a model or framework for observation and understanding, which influences both how we understand and what we see (Babbie, 2008). A paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about fundamental aspects of reality which in turn influence a particular world-view (Maree, 2010). It addresses fundamental assumptions taken on faith, such as the relationship between the known and the knower (epistemology); beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology); and the assumptions of methodologies (Maree, 2010). The disciplinary relationship, paradigm, methodological convictions, meta-theoretical concepts and central-theoretical statement are discussed next.

1.5.1 The disciplinary relationship

Engagement falls within the field of work-related well-being. Work related well-being falls within two disciplines, namely industrial and organisational psychology and health psychology. Both are briefly discussed.

Health psychology is the field concerned with the promotion of health and the treatment and prevention of illness related to psychological factors (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006). Subjective well-being is known in current research as an important indicator of an individual's well-being (Kahn & Juster, 2002). Well-being could be considered in terms of different life roles such as work, housing, family and marriage (Rothman, 2008). Work is a critical context for studying the well-being of individuals as it provides an income that has an impact on various life roles, and demands a significant contribution of an individual's energy and time (Rothman, 2008). Work is also ranked as one of the highest determinants of life satisfaction (Rothman, 2008). Work engagement, job satisfaction, occupational stress and burnout are all important elements of the affective well-being of employees (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001).

Industrial and organisational psychology is an applied division of psychology concerned with the study of human behaviour related to work, productivity and organisations (Cascio, 2001). The latter is applicable to this study as human behaviour (engagement) is researched in this study. Four broad

tasks are related to Industrial and organisational psychology (Ryan, 2003): (1) measuring behaviour and predicting potential; (2) explaining individual, group and organisational behaviour and optimising behaviour; (3) translating Industrial and organisational research findings into information that can be used to better the organisation; and (4) contributing to organisational development. Work engagement refers to expression of oneself through one's work and other employee-role activities (Kahn, 1990). Companies with engaged employees have improved customer satisfaction, better productivity, greater profitability and lower staff turnover than companies whose employees are not engaged in their work (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). From the latter one can establish that engagement has an effect on optimising organisational and individual behaviour, and contributes to organisational development.

1.5.2. Paradigm

The interpretive research paradigm used for this study is hermeneutic phenomenology, which involves respondents' subjective experiences of a certain phenomenon, as this study involves describing and exploring a phenomenon (engagement). This paradigm consists of contextual research and is less concerned about discovering universal laws of human behaviour and more concerned about making sense of human experience from in the context of human experience (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Terre-Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006). Hermeneutic phenomenology is known as an ideographic method of qualitative inquiry which focuses on interpreting individuals' experiences in order to obtain a critical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Kawulich & Holland, 2012; Shaw, 2010). A hermeneutic phenomenological orientation incorporates the scientific assumptions of both hermeneutics and phenomenology, and attempts to discover a deeper meaning of a particular phenomenon or experience, a meaning that lies beyond the surface-level subjective experience (Kafle, 2011).

Phenomenology refers to the way that people relate to the world in which they exist and their consciousness thereof (Blaikie, 2007; Mason, 1996; Terre-Blanche et al., 2006). Further, phenomenological research is an inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence or the meaning of human experiences with regard to a specific phenomenon described about the participant (Creswell, 2009). Understanding the lived experiences makes phenomenology a philosophy and method, and the procedure involves studying a small sample of participants through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

Specifically, phenomenology entails focusing on understanding the meaning of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 1991) by setting aside one's own presumptions, also known as bracketing,

and attempting to see the phenomenon as it really is (Osborne, 1994). In hermeneutic phenomenology bracketing does not require that we put our pre-understanding in brackets as this could result in one losing the meaning, but rather that we put our judgement in brackets in order to allow for openness towards the experience and to understand the meaning or essence of what the experience is all about (Linseth & Norberg, 2004). Linseth and Norberg (2004) suggest that the researcher refrains from making judgment but rather focuses on what has been experienced.

Hermeneutics is described as the art of reading texts or experiences in such a way that the intention and meaning of the part in relation to the whole is understood (Blaikie, 2007; Terre-Blanche et al., 2006; Thiselton, 2009). Hermeneutics allows for the researcher to enter into the life of the participant so as to observe and understand the participant's life (Blaikie, 2007). Schafer (2003) stated that when considering interpretations hermeneutically the interpretation can be presented as understood by the individual researcher and can be interpreted differently by other researchers.

This study makes use of phenomenological and hermeneutic assumptions stemming from the interpretive research orientation, therefore the study will rely on the lived experiences of the participants and constructed meaning. According to Terre-Blanche and Durrheim (2002), exploratory studies are generally used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research, generating speculative insights, new hypotheses and new questions. Exploratory studies generally rely on first-hand accounts and try to describe findings in rich detail.

The interpretive paradigm is a guiding worldview and allows for methodology where subjectivity can be taken into account (Terre-Blanche et al., 2006). The interpretive paradigm allows for a deep understanding of the phenomenon, and this is only possible through the interpretations of those experiencing that specific phenomenon (Shah & Corley, 2006). The interpretive paradigm is more concerned with contextual research; the paradigm looks at making sense of human experience from within the context of human experience (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). From the latter one can deduce that using the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm for this study will allow for a deeper understanding of HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions and will lead to the insight needed for this study.

Epistemology deals with the nature, processes and sources of knowing and knowledge (Baptiste, 2001). With the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study entails the researcher getting as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2013). This in turn means that subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views. This is how knowledge is generated and known – through the subjective experiences of people (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Creswell, 2013). It is vital that we conduct the studies in the field, where the participants work

and live, in order to grasp a better understanding of what the participants are saying. In this study interviews took place with HR practitioners at their place of work. In addition to this, I as researcher, have a better understanding of the environment as I currently work in the same environment as the participants (HR practitioners). This fact will aid in understanding the participants' responses and interpretations. The longer researchers are in the field of study or get to know the participants, "the more they know" from first-hand information (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive approach looks at how we can understand other's experiences by listening and interacting with them and hearing what they have to say (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Hermeneutic phenomenology provides for the interpretation of a participant's (HR practitioner's) experience, therefore the research paradigm I have chosen is in line with the epistemological assumptions.

The ontological dimension relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Baptiste (2001) further stated that ontology deals mainly with the question of what is real. Creswell (2013) explains that when researchers conduct qualitative research they are embracing a variety of different realities. When the qualitative researcher studies individuals, they do it with the intent of studying their multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). Understanding these multiple realities includes using forms of evidence in themes by using actual words of the participants and presenting them in different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutics involves the researcher assuming that the participant's subjective experiences are real (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). In the same way this study involves exploring what HR practitioners experience as real when dealing with or implementing engagement interventions, and how these very real experiences can be experienced differently from person to person. As this study has made use of the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm it focuses on understanding the meaning this phenomenon has (how the participants experience this phenomenon), and therefore the ontological assumptions are in congruence with the research paradigm used.

Like Lindseth and Norberg (2004) I as the researcher do not subscribe purely to phenomenology, which essentially refers to essences uncontaminated by interpretation. Nor do I purely subscribe to hermeneutics where interpretations of text do not move beyond the text to reveal essential traits of the live world. I subscribe specifically to a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation, which allows me to describe the lived experiences of HR practitioners of engagement interventions within a financial institution through phenomenology, and then allows the interpretation of the specific phenomenon through hermeneutics (Caputo, 1984).

The study was conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm with a primary goal of exploring an understanding the experiences of HR practitioners of engagement interventions within a financial institution. Therefore, this study is an exploratory study of an HR practitioner's subjective

experience.

1.5.3. Meta-theoretical concepts

Employee well-being or health psychology: Health psychology refers to the promotion of health and the treatment and prevention of illness that relates to psychological factors (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006). Subjective well-being is known as an important indicator of an individual's well-being (Kahn & Juster, 2002). Well-being affects various life roles of a person such as work, housing, family and marriage (Rothman, 2008). Important elements of well-being include engagement, job satisfaction, occupational stress and burnout (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001).

1.5.4. Central theoretical statement

Articulating and exploring the HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution will provide researchers insight into why engagement interventions may be failing or succeeding. As HR practitioners implement interventions related to engagement in most organisations, this research could assist in providing insight as to why many interventions related to engagement fail or succeed. This in turn can assist HR practitioners develop interventions that enhance and develop engagement rather than interventions that could ultimately result in failure.

1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research designs are procedures and plans for research and consist of decisions regarding the broad assumptions all the way to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). Research design involves the intersection of strategies of inquiry, philosophical assumptions and specific methods (Creswell, 2009). The design is presented below according to the research approach and method used.

1.6.1. Research approach

This study's research approach is a qualitative-explorative research approach. The interpretive research paradigm used in this study was hermeneutic phenomenology. The phenomenological element of this paradigm focuses specifically on the way people relate to the world in which they exist and their consciousness thereof (Blaikie, 2007; Mason, 1996; Terre-Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006). Hermeneutics allows the researcher to enter into the life of the participant through a lens that is used to understand and observe the participant's life (Blaikie, 2007).

Qualitative research studies seek to understand the worldviews and perspectives of the people involved in the study (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative approaches exhibit all or some of the characteristics of qualitative endeavour and do one of two things: either they combine several approaches and methodologies or they claim to have no methodological conviction at all (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Generally the study focuses on understanding a specific experience or event (Caelli et al., 2003). There are four issues for attention when making use of the generic qualitative research approach (Caelli et al., 2003): declaration of a researcher's position, congruence between method and methodology, clear articulations of the researchers approach to rigour, and lastly there must be an explanation of the researcher's analytic lens.

As this study is qualitative in nature, the research will describe and provide understanding of human interactions, meanings and different processes; it will therefore inform the researcher how individuals are experiencing a specific phenomenon (in this case, exploring how HR practitioners experience engagement interventions) in day to day life (Rynes, 2004).

Qualitative research is a means for understanding and exploring the meaning individuals or groups give a human or social problem (Creswell, 2009). Those who engage in qualitative research support a way of looking at research that honours the indicative style, a focus on individual meaning and the importance of explaining the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is commonly used to explore phenomena inductively and to provide more thick and detailed descriptions of the phenomena (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). In order to achieve the necessary insight into and understand the complexity of this phenomenon, the qualitative explorative research approach informed by the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm best suits this study.

1.6.2. Research strategy

The research strategy makes use of a qualitative-exploratory approach which consists of conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews as this allows for the accumulation of rich data. The participants selected are currently employed as HR practitioners in the HR department in this financial institution. A small sample of five employees from the HR department in this institution was used, as qualitative and exploratory research typically does not draw random samples or large samples (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). This qualitative study is guided by Tesch's (1990) framework for data analysis. Tesch's eight steps allow for a systematic process of analysing data (Creswell, 2009). An external transcriber and coder is used to ensure reliability and validity of the data presented in this study.

1.6.3. Research method

The research participants, measuring instruments, research procedure, sampling and data collection, and data analysis methods were as follows.

1.6.3.1. *Research setting*

The research setting was in a financial institution in the asset management industry where interviews were conducted with HR practitioners who work in the human resources department. The financial institution has approximately 670 employees to whom these HR practitioners provide a support service to. The HR practitioners are in a team of approximately 15 individuals. The institution is a corporate environment that is governed by stringent rules and regulations according to the Financial Services Board (FSB). The nature of the financial institution is asset management and investments and it provides an after service to clients. The institution has been listed on the JSE and is well known throughout South Africa.

1.6.3.2. *Entrée and establishing researcher roles*

It is particularly important in qualitative research that the researcher identifies his or her assumptions, personal values and biases and the outset of the study (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative studies accept researcher subjectivity as something that cannot be eliminated. The researcher is seen as the “research instrument” in the gathering of the data (Maree, 2010). I believe that the fact that the participants in the study are my colleagues and managers will have an effect on the way the information is conveyed during the course of the interview.

I currently work as an HR consultant in the financial institution where I will be conducting my research. In order for my research to be conducted, permission was firstly obtained from the Unisa ethics committee. I was granted permission to proceed with my research study (Appendix A). Secondly, I obtained permission from the head of the HR department by explaining what the research involved and how the process of interviews would take place. The head of HR felt comfortable with me conducting my research within the HR department, and signed the document to allow me to proceed (Appendix B).

Thereafter I approached the participants I wished to interview and explained the reasons why I need to conduct the research. I further informed them of what the interview would consist of and that they were not forced in any way to participate in the study. All participants gladly accepted the invitation to do the interview and proceeded to sign the written consent form as permission to conduct the research.

The gatekeeper (head of the HR department) will be allowed to view the final analysis of the data in order to provide him insight as to why many engagement interventions fail and how to ensure successful engagement interventions are implemented in his department. The study will not be disruptive as the interviews will be conducted in a neutral boardroom in another department. The latter will help remove the HR practitioners from the many disruptions or distractions that could take place if the interview was conducted in the HR department. The findings of the study will be reported as they are represented within the dissertation and given to the head of the HR department and to the participants in the study.

1.6.3.3. *Sampling*

Purposive sampling entails making use of participants who have a defining characteristic (in this case it would be those HR practitioners), and who are a useful source of the data we needed to obtain (Maree, 2010). The reason for this is that we required responses only from individuals who have experienced this phenomenon or have been impacted by the phenomenon. Specifically, stratified purposive sampling was used, which involved selecting participants according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a specific research question (Maree, 2010). Researchers are often particularly interested in studying deviant cases. These are cases that do not fit in the mainstream attitudes and behaviours. This is done in order to improve understanding of the more usual pattern (Babbie, 2008), which is the case in this study.

Therefore stratified purposeful sampling is the most effective sampling strategy, and it was employed to meet this study's aims. The following factors were kept in mind when choosing a representative sample: homogeneity or heterogeneity, gender, age, race, class, status, income and demographics (Maree, 2010). In order for the researcher to obtain a sample with the suitable characteristics as mentioned above, the following characteristics were established:

- The participants must be HR practitioners;
- The participants must be HR practitioners within this financial institution;
- The participants must at least have two years' experience in the HR field;
- The participants must understand and speak English; and
- The sample must include participants representing different denominations (African, coloured, white).

There is no right answer to the question of what is the correct sample size. This depends on a number of factors: the richness of the individual cases, the degree of commitment to the study's level of analysis and reporting, and the constraints the researcher is operating under (Smith, 2008).

This allowed for in-depth engagement with each participant but also allowed a detailed analysis of difference, similarity, convergence and divergence (Smith, 2008).

Qualitative and exploratory research typically does not draw random samples or large samples (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). A general guideline for sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few individuals but also to collect extensive details or information about participants (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the sample will consist of five employees in this HR department in this financial institution. This is in accordance with Babbie and Mouton (2001) that an appropriate sample size for a South African master's level qualitative study is between five and 25 participants.

1.6.3.4. Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews were made use of to ensure participants could share their experience of engagement interventions. The aim of qualitative research is to see how the participant views the world, to “see the world through their eyes”, as this is a very valuable piece of information one could use (Maree, 2010). In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer and interviewee are conversational rather than rigid and controlled. Semi-structured interviews allow for the probing and clarification of answers (Maree, 2010). As a researcher I was aware and paid attention to the respondent's answers so that I could identify new emerging lines of enquiry directly related to the phenomenon of engagement interventions. This allowed me to further explore these.

The semi-structured interview consisted of a face-to-face interaction where the interviewer asked the participants questions only after their consent was obtained. Interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were used to learn about participants' ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Maree, 2010). Open-ended questions were made use of as participants' views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes pertaining to how the HR practitioners experience engagement interventions were explored (De Vos et al., 2011; Maree, 2010).

The interview came close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it had a specific purpose, technique and approach. It was semi-structured – neither an open-ended conversation nor a closed questionnaire (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). It had a specific interview guide (shown in Table 1.1) that focused on specific themes and included suggested questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide consisted of six questions that took approximately 20 to 60 minutes to answer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview was transcribed verbatim and the written text and sound recording was constituted as the material for the analysis of meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Table 1.1*Interview Guide*

To explore HR practitioners experiences of engagement interventions within an financial institution	
To explore what the HR practitioner thinks engagement is.	
<u>Question 1:</u>	In your experience what is engagement and what does engagement consist of?
To investigate if the HR practitioner knows what an engagement intervention is.	
<u>Question 2:</u>	Have you heard of an intervention structured around engagement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think it is? • Can you give me an example of an engagement intervention?
To explore the HR practitioner's experience and perception of interventions structured around engagement.	
<u>Question 3:</u>	Do you believe interventions structured around engagement make a significant difference for the company or make a difference at all? Do you believe it's a positive or negative difference?
To understand what HR practitioners view their role as when it comes to implementing interventions structured around engagement.	
<u>Question 4:</u>	What do you think an HR practitioner's role is with regards to engagement and interventions structured around engagement?
To investigate if the HR practitioner is aware of what current engagement interventions are successful in today business world.	
<u>Question 5:</u>	In your opinion and experience, what do you believe is a successful engagement intervention?
To explore a real life situation or a lived experience of an engagement intervention.	
<u>Question 6:</u>	Have you experienced a successful intervention structured around engagement or been part of the process of implementing one? Please elaborate.

i. Procedure*Pre-interview preparations*

The participants were firstly spoken to regarding the scheduling of the interview to ensure that they were aware an interview would take place and that they would be interviewed shortly. A scheduled

meeting request was sent thereafter. The meeting was scheduled in a neutral venue, being another department's boardroom, to ensure no disruptions during the interview.

Conducting the interviews

The participants were asked to complete a consent form before proceeding with the interview. Once permission was obtained from the participant, the interview was conducted at a convenient time that was suitable for both participant and interviewer. A recorder was made use of once permission was obtained from the participant. Thereafter the interview commenced according to the interview guide (Table 1). The interview took place as an everyday conversation, as this ensured that the participant felt at ease and was comfortable with the interview questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

Post- interview feedback

The participants received a follow-up via written communication thanking them for making the time available to be interviewed. The findings of the study will be made available to the participants once the study has been concluded, should they show an interest in them.

1.6.3.5. Recording of data

Two recorders were made use of, one being an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder (VN-711PC) and secondly an S4 Samsung Galaxy phone. Participants will be informed as to how the data will be recorded, stored and processed (Terre-Blanche, 2004). Raw data containing individual personal details will be securely stored (Terre-Blanche, 2004). Data will be stored in a safe (secure combination lock) in a private residence to ensure the data is kept safe. The researcher, transcriber and external coder will have access to the data and data will be disclosed only if consent is obtained from the respondents. The transcriber has agreed to keep all data confidential. The data recordings will be backed up on an external hard drive.

Observational protocol

An observational protocol was made use of. This enabled the researcher to make multiple observations during the course of the qualitative interview and record the information while conducting the interview (Creswell, 2009). This consisted of a margin drawn on the side of the page with descriptive notes on elements such as a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular activities, as well reflexive notes made after the interview. These reflexive notes elaborated on aspects such as feelings, speculation, problems, ideas, hunches, prejudices and impressions (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). Demographic information was also noted, such as the place, time and setting of the interview (Creswell, 2009).

Transcribing

Transcriptions are constructions from an oral interview to a written text (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Transcribing was done by an external experienced transcriber in order to ensure reliability and validity of the interview transcriptions. The transcription procedure involved listening to the recorder and typing it verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. The transcriptions from the experienced transcriber will then be checked against the recording to ensure they accurately reflect what was said in the interview. Transcriptions will be kept confidentially on an external hard drive that will be protected by passwords.

1.6.3.6. *Data analysis*

“Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretive philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data” (Maree, 2010, p.99). To put it simply, qualitative data aims to explain how individuals make meaning of certain phenomena by analysing their perceptions, understanding, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, experiences and values in an attempt to approximate their construction of that phenomenon (Maree, 2010). Patton (2002) also stated that qualitative analysis actually transforms the data into findings. The latter involved firstly reducing the volume of the raw information obtained from the data collection methods, and then identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed (De Vos et al., 2011). Kafle (2011) emphasizes that there is no fixed method to use when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research. Therefore we made use of Tesch’s (1990) framework for data analysis as this is known as a useful data analysis method (Creswell, 2009).

According to Maree (2010), qualitative data analysis is an iterative (non-linear) and on-going process, which means the collection of data, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined. The process is not one of successive steps (Maree, 2010). Qualitative data analysis does not proceed in a linear fashion but is an ambiguous and time consuming process; but it is also creative (De Vos et al., 2011). When analysing qualitative data one’s goal is to summarise what one has heard or seen into different themes, patterns, phrases and words that will help one understand and interpret what is taking place (Maree, 2010; Patton, 2002). The latter includes the participant’s perceptions, understanding, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, experiences and values (Maree, 2010).

This qualitative study was guided by Tesch’s (1990) framework for data analysis. Tesch’s eight steps allow for a systematic process of analysing data (Creswell, 2009). The eight steps are:

1. Firstly, one needs to make sense of the data and look at the data in a holistic manner. To do this I read through all the transcriptions carefully and wrote down any ideas that come to

mind.

2. Thereafter I picked one interview, perhaps the shortest or most interesting interview, went through it and asked what it is about. I thought about its meaning, and tried not to think about the substance of the information. Next I wrote down my thoughts in the margin.
3. Once this task was completed for all the participants, I made a list of all the topics that come forth from the interviews. Then I clustered the topics that are similar together. I then arranged these topics into columns, according to major and minor topics and leftovers.
4. Once I completed the list I returned to the data. I abbreviated the topics as codes and indicated the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. This was done to see if any new categories or codes emerged.
5. I then found the most descriptive wording for all my topics and turned them into specific categories. I then looked at reducing my categories by grouping topics that related to one another. I tried to show interrelationships between categories.
6. A final decision was then made on what abbreviations would be used for each category and then I alphabetized these codes.
7. I then assembled the data material belonging to each category in one place and performed a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary one can recode one's data, but this was not necessary in this case.

After I coded my data, the transcriptions were sent to the external coder. Once completed, the external coder and I compared themes to insure that similar themes were identified. The latter enhanced the validity and credibility of the data (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.6.3.7. Strategies employed to ensure quality data and ethical considerations

Strategies used to ensure quality data, and ethical considerations, are discussed below.

i. Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Two prominent qualitative researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1999), propose that the following four constructs, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability be included in a qualitative study, as they believe the assumptions reflect the paradigm more accurately than validity, reliability and objectivity (De Vos et al., 2011). Additional to this crystallisation will be discussed. The first of the criteria, credibility, is generally thought of as the most important (De Vos et al., 2011):

- *Credibility/ Authenticity.* This is the alternative to internal validity in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry or interview was done in such a manner to ensure that the subject has been accurately described and identified (De Vos et al., 2011). The

researcher has to determine whether there is a match between the participant's views and the researcher's reconstruction or representation of them. In order to enhance credibility of the study a peer debriefer was used to enhance the accuracy of the account. My supervisor played this role. An independent transcriber was used to ensure limited bias was brought into the transcribing of the data. An external coder was used to ensure that the themes identified are co-agreed upon and this in turn will enhance the credibility of the data collected. The report of the external coder can be seen in appendix D.

- *Transferability.* What this involves is the researcher asking whether the findings of the research can be transferred from one situation to another (De Vos et al., 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1999) propose this as the alternative to generalizability or external validity. One additional strategic choice can enhance the study's generalizability: triangulating multiple sources of data (De Vos et al., 2011). In this study, multiple sources of data were used, such as interviews and reflexive notes. In addition, rich and thick descriptions of my findings will be used. This description of the phenomenon will transport the readers to the research setting and will give my discussion an element of a shared experience (Creswell, 2009).
- *Dependability.* This consisted of asking whether the research process is logical, audited and well documented. This is known as the alternative to reliability, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study as well as the changes in the study's design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the research setting (De Vos et al., 2011). Data protocol and transcriptions were used, as well as reflexive notes to ensure the research process is well documented. An external transcriber and external coder were used to ensure the research was an accurate account of the interview and that the most relevant themes are identified. Transcriptions were checked by me as researcher against the recordings to ensure dependability. Coding was also be done by me to ensure that the most relevant themes were identified. The external coder and I compared themes to ensure that the most accurate themes were identified.
- *Conformability.* This final construct is compared to the traditional concept of objectivity (De Vos et al., 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1999) ask whether the findings of the study can be confirmed by another. Reflexive notes were made in a margin of the page. If the study was to be repeated, similar conditions will be used. Bias will also be clarified: behind the scenes self-reflection was made use of when interpreting the findings by

providing comments shaped around my background, history and socioeconomic origin and how these affect my research (Creswell, 2009).

- *Crystallization.* Further, crystallization was used to enhance the quality of the data. Crystallization refers to the practice of “validating results by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Maree, 2010, p. 40). Crystallization is similar to triangulation (primarily used for quantitative data) but is a ‘better lens through which to view the components in qualitative research’ (Janesick, 2004, p. 392). By using crystallization one can enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Maree, 2010). Crystallization provides us with a ‘deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic’ (Janesick, 2004, p. 392). Though crystallization, reliability and validity of the research will increase. To crystallize the information, data will be compared to that of similar studies in order to ensure validity. Peer debriefing will also be made use of. This involves making use of my supervisor (a peer debriefer) who will review and ask questions about my qualitative study. This will enhance the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2009).

ii. **Ethical Considerations**

Firstly, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (see Appendix A) to conduct this research. Secondly, permission was obtained from the head of HR to conduct the research in the HR department of the financial institution (Appendix B).

In order for the study to be ethical, the study made use of the following considerations:

Informed Consent

Consent must be voluntary and informed (Creswell, 2013; Terre-Blanche, 2004). When participants took part in the study they were informed of what exactly the study entailed (Appendix C). They were informed in a non-technical way and given a clear explanation as to what I am doing and how it affects them (Creswell, 2013). The researcher was available to answer any questions participants have about the research being conducted, at any time.

Confidentiality

The informed consent form was signed by participants and ensured that the parameters of confidentiality were abided to (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004). Any limitations to confidentiality, such as informing the participants that the data will be sent to an external transcriber and coder, were made known to the participant before the research was conducted. Limitations were specified in a clear and unambiguous manner. Participants were

informed as to how the data will be recorded, stored and processed. Raw data containing individual personal details should be securely stored (Terre-Blanche, 2004).

Autonomy

The participants have freedom to withdraw from the research at any time (Creswell, 2013; Terre-Blanche, 2004). The participants were informed of the latter before the interview took place. This is also detailed in the consent form.

Nonmaleficence

This means that the researcher may not harm any participant during the conducting of the research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004). This includes emotional, social and physical harm. The participants were informed that should they experience any harm, be it emotion, social or physical, they are to inform the University of South Africa immediately.

Beneficence

This refers to conducting research that will benefit, if not the research participant, then other researchers or society at large (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004). The research will benefit the participants, as the research will help them as HR practitioners to identify what interventions structured around engagement are successful and what interventions are not. A full analysis report will be given to the participants once the dissertation has been submitted.

Reporting findings

Care should be taken in ensuring the anonymity of participants. Researchers may not falsify or fabricate data in their publications and should also state the limitations of their findings (Terre-Blanche, 2004). Both the researcher and the participant should benefit from the research done (Creswell, 2009). This dissertation will be made available to the wider HR and IOP fraternity, as well as the wider academic community (Creswell, 2013).

According to Babbie (2004) there are two ethical issues that are of concern when analysing and reporting qualitative data: (1) the data can be biased (as we are dealing with subjective research). The researcher could ask questions that will confirm what he feels is the right answer and this poses the risk of looking for what one wants to find. But Babbie (2004, p. 439) suggests that a researcher can address researcher bias by 'cultivating a deliberate awareness of their own values and preferences, and by adhering to established techniques for data collection and analysis'. (2) Qualitative data must be protected and kept private (Babbie, 2004). I made a concerted effort to protect the subjective data material as the identities of the participants are often in the data.

1.7. FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The research findings on how HR practitioners experience engagement interventions will be reported according to what was discovered. Findings will be presented in a descriptive, narrative form rather than a scientific report (Creswell, 2009). The findings will describe the participants' experiences and the meaning they attach to their experiences; this will provide a lens in which the reader can view the participant's subjective world (Creswell, 2009). The findings were reported by making use of the participants' verbatim words and converting these into different themes and concepts. Verbatim quotes were made use of in order to substantiate the different themes and their relevant sub-themes.

1.7. DISCUSSION

Research findings will be reported and interpreted in accordance with what was discovered and will be referenced by making use of relevant literature. Limitations and themes identified from the collection of data will also be discussed. Possible future research will also be discussed.

1.9. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.9.1 Conclusion

The conclusion will be based on the findings of the exploratory qualitative research study and will aim to answer the research's purpose, which is to explore HR practitioner's experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

1.9.2 Limitations

Interviewer biases will play a role in the collection and interpretation of the data. I am currently an HR practitioner in this financial institution, and this could have an effect on the information obtained from the interviews, as participants may have wanted to represent their knowledge in a more positive light than what they would have done in the case of a neutral researcher.

1.9.3 Recommendations

The study proposes to make the following recommendations: depending on what is discovered, future research will be suggested. The literature review was able to provide insight into engagement,

engagement interventions and the HR practitioner's role in the implementation of engagement interventions. There is a gap in literature around the HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions. Further qualitative and quantitative research should explore the experiences of HR practitioners when they implement engagement interventions in order to obtain further knowledge into what leads to a successful engagement interventions, and to further clarify the role of an HR practitioner or Industrial psychologists in the implementation of these engagement interventions.

1.10. CHAPTER LAYOUT

The chapters were presented in the following manner:

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research article

Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

1.11. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 1 the scientific orientation of the research was discussed. This chapter contained the background and motivation, the research problem, aims, the paradigm perspective and the research design. The chapter ended with the chapter layout.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will address all literature relevant to this study. Aspects to be addressed in the literature review include engagement; engagement and interventions structured around engagement; and engagement and HR practitioners.

2.1. Introduction

Business needs today are driven by intense and often global competition, which increases the need for employees to be emotionally and cognitively engaged and committed to their company, customers and work (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Today, increased focus is put on engagement due to turbulent times and changes, organisational churn and dramatic cost cutting (Richman, 2006). Pech and Slade (2006) stated that no organisation can afford not to use its employees' energy to full advantage. Further it was found that engagement is a critical element of this underlying energy. The payoff of an energized workforce is enormous. It can lead to increased productivity, retention, and engagement and in turn leads to reduced staff turnover (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). However, it has been reported in research that engagement is on the decline and there is increased disengagement among employees today (Richman, 2006). This could be attributed to the fact that many engagement interventions are not achieving the desired results (Jorgensen, 2006). Engagement is something organisations either enhance or undermine; it is more influenced by management practices and features such as personality and demographics (Richman, 2006). So if a company is not intentionally trying to increase organisational engagement and commitment, chances are that they are minimizing or even crushing it.

The need of business to maximise the inputs of employees has contributed a great deal to engagement (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). In a 2004 Hewitt study, companies that have the highest employee engagement levels show a four-year average total shareholder return (TSR) of 20 percent or higher than companies with lower engagement levels. This is nearly triple that of companies with lower levels of engagement (Richman, 2006). Gallup studies estimate that highly engaged employees account for 90 percent of the organisation's productivity, and estimated that 19 percent of US workers who are not engaged miss 118.3 million more work days than engaged employees (Richman, 2006). Satisfaction is a much lower form of engagement. Employees can still be satisfied with the job because it is close to home or it pays the bills but that does not guarantee employees are emotionally, physically and mentally invested in the organization's success, which are known as the pillars of engagement (Wollard, 2011).

Failure to be engaged is characterised by the disconnection of individuals from their work roles to

protect themselves mentally, emotionally or physically from perceived or real threats (Wollard, 2011). This disconnection can be operationalized in their failure to find meaning in the day-to-day work itself, or having to separate work life from outside beliefs and activities, or failure to find purpose in what the organisation does, or the sense that an individual lacks the power to overcome the stagnation and frustration experienced in the work environment (Sheep, 2006). Companies with a high level of engagement can generate revenue as much as 40% higher than companies with low engagement levels (Herman, Olivo, & Gioia, 2003).

Entire companies and international consulting firms devote themselves to the diagnosis, evaluation and development of solutions to enhance engagement in organisations. But few of these organisations have a common definition, application or measurement approach to engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). An engaged workforce contributes significantly to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage (Macey & Schneider, 2008). With the latter in mind, organisations and their leader are focusing on more productive ways to enhance engagement in their organisations. However, 85% of employees still doubt their employer's knowledge about how to develop engagement at work (Czarnowsky, 2008).

In many organisations in South Africa and internationally, HR practitioners are responsible for the implementation of engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). In light of the latter, possible reasons why engagement may be decreasing or why interventions structured around engagement are not achieving the desired outcome may be that HR practitioners do not understand the concept of engagement and how to implement an engagement intervention effectively. This study aims to explore what HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions are, and this in turn may provide insight into why interventions structured around engagement are succeeding or failing in the business world today. This literature review will help provide the necessary insight into the different elements involved in this study, namely, engagement, engagement interventions and an HR practitioner's role.

2.2. Engagement

This section firstly defines engagement; secondly, it elaborates on possible antecedents of engagement and lastly discusses engagement models.

2.2.1 Defining engagement

In order to gain an insight into how HR practitioners experience engagement, it is important to define what engagement is and what specific elements of engagement are relevant for this research.

According to Kahn (1990) engagement entails the simultaneous employment and expression of an employee's preferred self in task behaviours that promotes personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), connection to work and others, and active performance roles. In a South African context, it was found by Naude and Rothmann (2006) that engagement is generally defined as an energetic state in which an employee is committed to excellent performance at work and is confident in his or her effectiveness.

Kahn (1990) explored people's experiences of themselves in their work roles and how they are influenced by moments of personal engagement and disengagement. He stated that people ask themselves three questions in each role situation: (1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself to this performance; (2) how safe is it to do so; and (3) how available am I to do so? According to Kahn (1990), these three psychological conditions affect engagement. Kahn (1990) identified these three psychological conditions as psychological safety, psychological meaningfulness and psychological availability. Similar to Kahn (1990), Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales and Bakker (2002) defined engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind which is characterised by absorption, dedication and vigour. Vigour refers to mental resilience and high levels of energy when working in the workplace, as well as the willingness to invest time in bettering one's own work. Absorption refers to being totally and happily immersed in one's own work and having difficulty in separating oneself from one's work. Dedication refers to getting a sense of significance from one's work, being proud and enthusiastic about one's job and being inspired and challenged by the job (Schaufeli et al, 2002). Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement has specific relevance to this study as the same factors will be used to gain an understanding and insight of the HR practitioners' experiences of engagement. The three psychological conditions of engagement identified by Kahn (1990) will now be discussed.

Psychological meaningfulness refers to when one feels one is receiving a return on investment of oneself through the means of physical, emotional and cognitive energy (Kahn, 1990). Psychological meaningfulness occurs when an individual feels valuable and useful and is influenced by work-role fit and interpersonal relationships with co-workers (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). A perceived fit between the individual's self-concept and his or her work role will lead to an increased sense of meaning, due to the ability of the individual to express his or her values and beliefs (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). In the work context, meaningfulness can be defined as the value of a purpose or work goal which is judged in relation to an individual's own identity (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Meaningfulness is a result of feeling that one's job is valuable and that one makes a difference (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). Employees tend to seek out work roles that allow them to behave in a way that expresses their self-concepts. Work roles and activities that are aligned with self-concept are associated with more meaningful work experiences (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). The

restoration of meaning in work is seen as a method to enhance employees' motivation and feeling of belongingness to their work role, which in turn results in increased engagement (May et al., 2004). Furthermore employees who spend time on desired activities experience better work-role fit which in turn leads to one experiencing more psychological meaningfulness, which results in higher levels of work engagement (May et al., 2004; Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). May et al. (2004) and Rothmann and Rothmann (2010) found the psychological condition of meaningfulness to be the strongest predictor of engagement. In South Africa, studies pertaining specifically to psychological meaningfulness and work role fit are limited (Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010).

Psychological safety was defined by Kahn (1990) as a feeling of being able to show and employ oneself without the fear of negative consequences to one's status, career or self-image. Individuals feel safe if they perceive that they will not be harmed or suffer if they express their true selves at work (May et al., 2004). Unsafe conditions exist when situations feel unpredictable, ambiguous and threatening (May et al., 2004). Supporting and trusting supervisory and co-worker relations, and flexibility in behavioural norms, lead to greater feelings of psychological safety (May et al., 2004). Individuals who experience rewarding interpersonal interactions, and who experience co-worker interactions, tend to develop a sense of belonging and stronger sense of social identity, which in turn leads to greater psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). Although May et al. (2004) found a positive association between psychological safety and engagement, Olivier and Rothmann (2007) were not able to establish the same association. Further, Rothmann and Rothmann (2010) found that psychological safety did not mediate the relationship between supervisor relations and co-worker relations, which was a factor of psychological safety in May et al. (2004). Rothmann and Rothmann's (2010) study also contradicted May et al. (2004) findings that psychological safety displayed a strong relationship with employee engagement. This however could be attributed to the poor reliability of the scale used to measure psychological safety (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

Psychological availability refers to having the necessary psychological, physical and emotional resources to engage at a particular moment (Kahn, 1990). Psychological availability is influenced by emotional energy, physical energy, insecurity (heightened self-consciousness, lack of self-confidence and ambivalence) and the fit with the organisation and non-work events (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). Psychological availability refers to whether an individual is confident enough or is ready to engage in a work role given that people are engaged in many other roles in their various life activities (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). May et al. (2004), Olivier and Rothmann (2007) and Rothmann and Rothmann (2010) confirmed that psychological availability is positively associated with employee engagement.

These three psychological conditions will be explored in this study, and may play a part in

influencing the degree to which the participants' engages with their work role (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). If individuals see their current work role as being meaningful to them they are more likely to engage in it (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). Psychological safety also leads to engagement at work, as the individual can express his or her opinion without the fear of any negative consequences (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). When the environment is viewed as threatening, ambiguous and unpredictable, individuals are less likely to engage. Individuals are more likely to engage in work if they believe they have the cognitive, physical and emotional resources to do so.

Further, a slightly varying definition could be that of May et al. (2004) conceptualised engagement by placing importance on people bringing their emotional, physical and cognitive resources to bear on role-related tasks when they engage themselves in work. May et al. (2004) argued that most jobs entail an element of physicality and challenges, as well as cognitive demands and emotional exhaustion, which varies by job and person. In the similar study conducted by Olivier and Rothmann (2007), it was established that even if antecedents such as work-role fit, self-consciousness and resources were present and could act as predictors of engagement, the effect of such characteristics are mediated by the psychological conditions of availability and meaningfulness. Therefore it has been established by Olivier and Rothmann (2007) that people need to find their work meaningful and have the resources to make themselves available to engage in their work.

Macey and Schneider (2008) categorised engagement into three broad conceptualisations: state, behavioural and trait engagement. State engagement refers to the extension of oneself in one's current role (Kahn, 1990). In order for the human spirit to thrive at work, employees must be able to engage themselves emotionally, physically and cognitively (Kahn, 1990). State engagement is specifically relevant for this study and refers to opportunities to use one's strengths to lead to a greater work-role fit, and this in turn leads to work engagement (May et al, 2004; Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

Further, a definition widely used in the HR community is provided by Shuck and Wollard (2010) who defined engagement as 'an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (sic) state directed toward desired organizational outcomes' (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 103). This definition is built on the seminal definitions of employee engagement by Kahn (1990), Macey and Schneider (2008) and Maslach et al. (2001). Cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement are now discussed in detail.

Cognitive Engagement

Kahn's (1990) early conceptualisation of cognitive engagement derives from an employee's

determination as to whether he or she believe their work is meaningful and safe (emotionally, psychologically, and physically), as well as whether the necessary resources, tangible or intangible, are available to complete their work (Shuck & Reio, 2011). From the latter one can deduce that engagement is a delicate phenomenon as it is very difficult to develop and to sustain (Kahn, 1990), because it depends on one's work environment (Shuck & Reio, 2011). The decision-making process is used to determine the value of a specific situation, and this judgement of the situation determines whether an individual intends engaging with the work environment or not. This critical and often silent decision is usually made privately in the mind of the employee (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Employees who find their work to be meaningful, safe and available will appraise their work as positive and will begin with the next step in the process. Those individuals who find their work to have little meaning, or find it unsafe, or lack the necessary resources to get their work done will often choose to pull or push away (Kahn, 1990). Literature suggests that employees appraise their work role (cognitive expression of the work context), and this in turn determines their level of engagement (Czarnowsky, 2008). Those who find their work meaningful will tend to embrace and engage in their work (Shuck & Reio, 2011). In contrast, employees who find their work to be unsafe, not meaningful and lacking resources often develop feelings of rejection, loneliness, unfriendliness (Maslow, 1970), and eventually they burn out (Maslach et al., 2001).

Cognitive engagement very much involves how the employee thinks about or understands his or her culture, job and company, and represents his or her organisational commitment (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Employees who are cognitively engaged will respond positively to statements such as: 'The work I do does make a contribution to the organisation'; 'I have the resources to do my job at the level expected of me'; and 'I feel safe at work, no one will make fun of me here' (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement involves the emotional bond one feels towards one's place of work and involves one's willingness to involve personal resources such as one's knowledge, belief and pride (Shuck & Reio, 2011). An employee's emotional bond with his or her organisation is considered to be a main determinant in the employee's loyalty and commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). Both are outcomes of engagement (Czarnowsky, 2008). Emotional engagement concerns the beliefs and feelings held by those individuals who are cognitively engaged, perhaps determining how these beliefs and feelings are formed, influenced and directed towards an outward display of effort (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Emotionally engaged employees will respond positively to statements such as: 'I am proud to work here'; and 'I feel a strong sense of belonging and identify with my

organisation' (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Behavioural Engagement

According to Shuck and Reio (2011) behavioural engagement is the most obvious form of engagement. Behavioural engagement involves the physical and overt manifestation of emotional and cognitive engagement and can be understood as an increased level of discretionary effort (Macey & Schneider, 2008), a variable that is associated with effort and performance (Lloyd, 2008). Discretionary effort is a multidimensional variable consisting of an employee's willingness to exert effort beyond the standard job description (Lloyd, 2008). An employee's willingness to engage in discretionary effort indicates that the employee is willing to take action which will result in specific behaviour being exhibited and is indicative of an employee's engagement level (Lloyd, 2008). Behaviourally engaged employees are expected to respond positively to statements such as: 'I work harder than is expected to help my organisation be successful' and 'When I work, I really push myself beyond what is expected of me' (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

In summary, engagement is operationally defined as a series of psychological states, emotional, cognitive and behavioural, which ultimately represent the intention of incorporating motivation-like qualities (Shuck & Reio, 2013). Further to this definition, based on the perspectives of Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) it can be concluded that engagement consists of three dimensions: firstly a physical element, which involves being physically involved in a task and showing a positive affective state and vigour when completing that task; secondly, a cognitive component, which involves experiencing involvement and absorption, and being alert at work; and lastly, an emotional component, which is when one is connected to one's job while working and shows commitment and dedication to one's job (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

2.2.2 Engagement models

Apart from the commitment pyramid (Figure 1), engagement models can also help identify some antecedents or factors of engagement and will now be discussed. One of the most well-known engagement or well-being models is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which has a main goal of addressing well-being in the workplace. The Job Demands-Resources model assumes that every occupation has unique work characteristics associated with well-being, and the characteristics form part of two broad categories: job demand and job resources (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job demands refers to those psychological, social, physical and organisational factors of the job that require sustained physical or psychological effort and are therefore associated with certain psychological or physiological costs which may include role overload, emotional

demand or work pressure (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Job resources refers to those physical, social, organisational and psychological aspects of a job that may be functional in achieving organisational goals, which reduce job demands and stimulate personal development and growth (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

Additional to this, in a study conducted by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) an overall model of work engagement was produced which identified antecedents and consequences of work engagement. According to this model, job resources such as performance feedback, skill variety, social support from managers and colleagues, and autonomy, lead to motivational processes which increase engagement and results in higher performance (Bakker, 2011). The model suggests that job resources become more prominent and gain their motivational potential when employees have high job demands, which could include emotional demand, mental demand, workload, etc (Bakker, 2011).

In a South African study, Rothmann, Strydom and Mostert (2006) developed a questionnaire to help identify job demands and resources as conceptualised in the JD-R model as discussed above. They found that job demands and resources consisted mainly of five factors: (1) job insecurity, (2) growth opportunities, (3) overload, (4) advancement, and (5) organisational support. Job insecurity referred to feeling insecure in one's current job and level and with regard to the future of one's role. Growth opportunities referred to opportunities to advance one's learning, and having enough variety and independence. Overload referred to the amount of emotional load, mental load, and amount of work. Advancement refers to moving forward in the organisation, and includes aspects such as training, career opportunities and remuneration. Organisational support refers to relationships with one's immediate supervisor, communication, participation, availability of information, social support for colleagues and contact opportunities within the organisation (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

The Job Characteristics model can also be used to identify workplace factors that can lead to top performance in the workplace (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This model refers to five job characteristics that impact employee psychological states (Steger, Litman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013). These psychological states will in turn influence work outcomes, which may include engagement (Steger et al., 2013). Job resources such as support from colleagues and supervisors, learning opportunities and performance feedback, as well as positive job characteristics such as skill variety and autonomy, are known to be precursors to work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Another model that has received increased interest looked specifically at individual-level personality factors that may be antecedents of precursors to engagement (Steger et al., 2013). The research

primarily focused on the connection between work engagement and the Big Five personality dimensions, known as neuroticism, openness, extroversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Steger et al., 2013). Kim, Shin and Swanger (2009) examined the Big Five and work engagement and it was determined that conscientiousness was the most dominant trait to influence engagement in the workplace. Therefore it was determined that employees who are high in conscientiousness, for example, have strong organisational skills and have a strong sense of responsibility are more than likely to invest energy in to their work, feel a stronger sense of professional efficacy and are most likely to complete the job (Steger et al., 2013).

2.2.2 Factors or Antecedents that affect engagement

Engagement has been defined above and the factors and antecedents that affect engagement will now be discussed in order to provide an insight into what factors could influence engagement within this financial institution. Antecedents of engagement are defined as strategies, constructs or conditions that precede the development of engagement within an organisation and can result in an organisation reaping the benefits of engagement-related outputs such as higher level of productivity and lower levels of staff turnover (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Several studies (Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006) suggest that an employee's direct manager plays an important role in the development of an engagement-encouraging culture. The reason for this is that the direct line manager has the potential to provide a sense of meaningful work, necessary resources for employees to complete their work, and a safe area for employees to work (Kahn, 1990).

The pyramid below (Figure 2.1) indicates what can lead to enhanced engagement within an organisation (Richman, 2006). Firstly, at the bottom level of the pyramid are threshold factors. These factors refer must be in place for an organisation to be an effective competitor for the best human capital (Richman, 2006). The second level contains the enablers. Enablers are the factors that set an organisation apart from the competition and enable employees to align their activities towards the organisation's goals and objectives (Richman, 2006). Although these building blocks are essential to creating an effective workforce, the real competitive advantage is achieved for employees and the organisation at the top of the pyramid. The top of the pyramid is known as the commitment drivers, and these are factors that encourage full engagement of employees. It is vital that organisations address these factors if it wishes to obtain a real competitive advantage from its workforce by attracting and keeping the best employees, and by drawing out full potential (Richman, 2006).

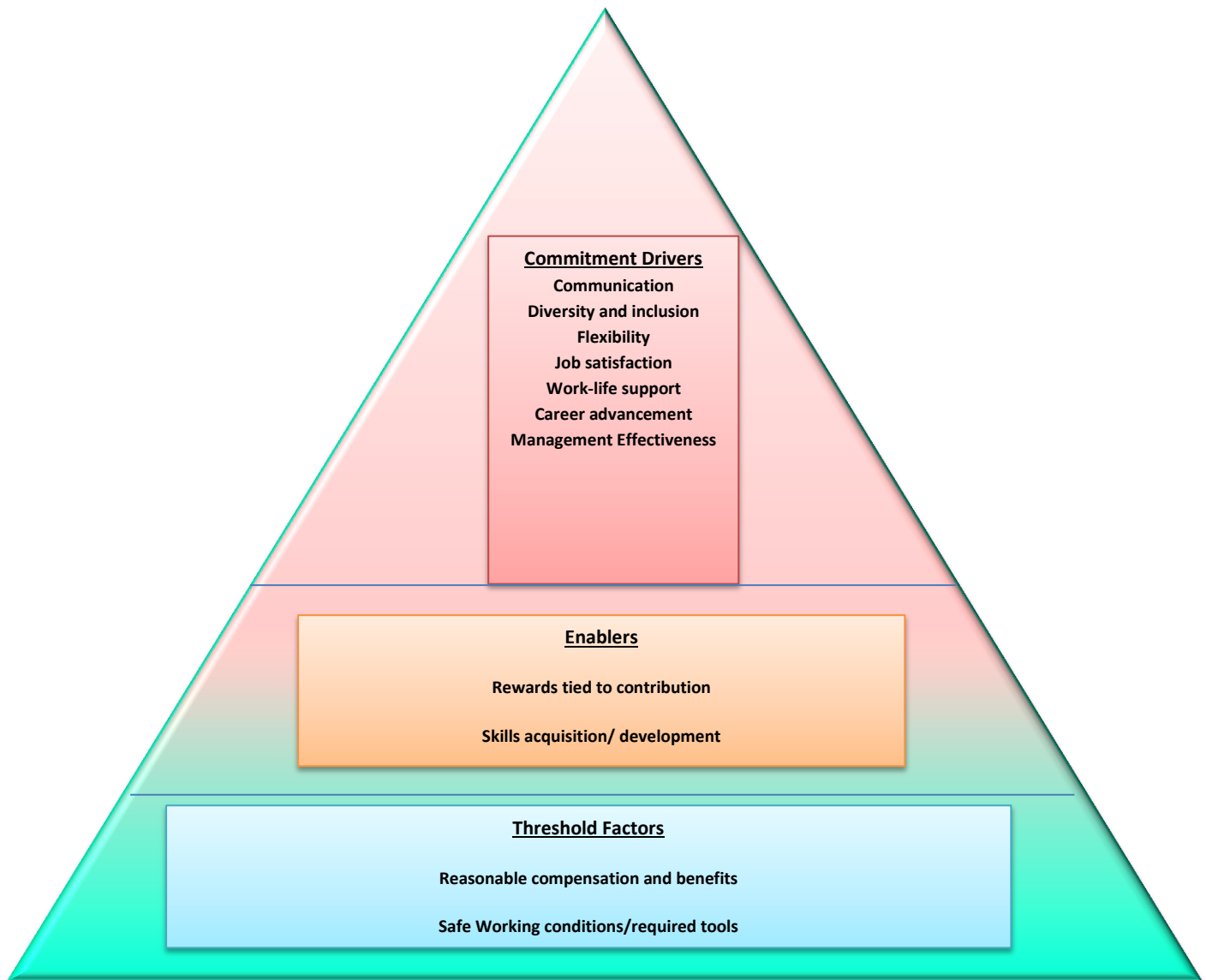


Figure 2.1: Commitment Pyramid: Factors that can lead to enhanced engagement (WFD Consulting National Study, 2002)

If all three levels are reached, employees will be engaged. Engaged employees exhibit the following characteristics (Richman, 2006):

- They are energized, committed and work hard to help the company succeed;
- They say they work for the organisation because they want to;
- They exert extraordinary effort to do whatever it takes to make and keep the company successful, while promoting the company's culture;
- They use their energy, skills, creativity and experience to deliver results and satisfy customers;

- They are action-orientated and know how to take intelligent risks; and
- They see their role as following through to make sure that problems identified are solved.

A similar study was conducted by Wollard and Shuck (2011), where antecedents of engagement were identified. According to Wollard and Shuck (2011) little research has been focused on engagement-enhancing strategies. The latter makes it difficult for HR practitioners to develop organisational engagement strategies. Practitioners who can identify potential antecedents in their organisation will be better informed to present viable strategies to stakeholders, communicate a clear and more effective vision and mission and will be better positioned to identify potential challenges (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). One hopes that through this study, HR practitioners will have a more informed view of what antecedents are effective in enhancing engagement within organisations.

A conceptual model (Table 2.1) represented below was developed by Wollard and Shuck (2011) of all the known antecedents of engagement. Antecedents were identified on two levels: (a) individual antecedents, and (b) organisational antecedents. Individual antecedents were defined as strategies, constructs and conditions that were applied directly to or by individual employees and are believed to be the foundation for the creation and development of engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Organisational-level antecedents were defined as the conditions, strategies and constructs that are applied across the whole organisation and are the foundation to the development of employee engagement on a systematic and structural level (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Eleven of the 21 antecedents have been reported in current literature to have empirical evidence supporting them. Thirteen of the 21 organisational antecedents were reported with empirical evidence in current literature of employee engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Table 2.1:

Individual-level and organisational-level antecedents of employee engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011)

** Denotes antecedent with empirical evidence*

Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement	Organisational Antecedents to Employee Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Absorption* ▪ Available to engage ▪ Coping style ▪ Curiosity ▪ Dedication* ▪ Emotional fit ▪ Employee motivation ▪ Employee/work/ family status ▪ Feelings of choice and control ▪ Higher levels of corporate citizenship* ▪ Involvement in meaningful work* ▪ Link individual and organizational goals* ▪ Optimism ▪ Perceived organisational support* ▪ Self-efficacy, Self-esteem ▪ Vigour* ▪ Willingness to direct personal energies ▪ Work/ life balance* ▪ Core self-evaluation* ▪ Value Congruence* ▪ Perceived Organizational Support* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Authentic corporate culture* ▪ Clear expectations* ▪ Corporate social responsibility* ▪ Encouragement ▪ Feedback ▪ Hygiene factors ▪ Job characteristics* ▪ Job control ▪ Job fit* ▪ Leadership ▪ Level of task challenge* ▪ Manager expectations* ▪ Manager self-efficacy* ▪ Mission and vision ▪ Opportunities for learning ▪ Perception of workplace safety* ▪ Positive workplace climate* ▪ Rewards* ▪ Supportive organisational culture* ▪ Talent management ▪ Use of strengths*

Individual antecedents

Employee engagement is an individual variable that is most often measured on an organisational level (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Personal and individual factors of an employee have a massive role to play both inside and outside the organisation. Little is known about the individual antecedents of engagement and which of these variables contribute to the overall development of engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Wollard and Shuck (2011) identified some of the antecedents in literature, but said that they were open to debate and critique. These individual antecedents will now be

discussed. The role of a meaningful workplace environment and an employee's involvement in meaningful work is thought to be related to engagement (May et al., 2004). The perceptions of a culturally, physically and emotionally safe environment, as individual factors, are also shown to be antecedents of engagement (May et al., 2004). Issues of work-life balance (Singh, 2010), alignment of employees' work to the organisation's goals (Harter, et al., 2002), and personal involvement in corporate citizen behaviour (Glavis & Piderit, 2009) are also addressed in engagement literature. Work by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) and Maslach and Leiter (1997) suggests that variables such as dedication, absorption in one's work and vigour are all individual antecedents to the development of engagement. Several workplace antecedent models have suggested that antecedent factors such as curiosity (Reio, Petrosko, Wiswell, & Thongsukmag, 2006), self-esteem, perception of self, coping style (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007), optimism, and self-efficacy (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006) play a part in the development of work-related variables on an individual level.

Organisational antecedents

Antecedents that drive engagement on an organisational level revolve around basic employee or human demands (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). The identification of meeting the employee's basic needs reflects lack of complexity, but at the same time highlights the difficulty of creating organisational conditions for engagement to occur (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). The role of management has been explored empirically, using the satisfaction-engagement approach (Shuck, 2011). Research has propagated the role of manager self-efficacy (Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007), execution of the vision and mission (Fleming & Asplund, 2007), the role of a manager in creating a supportive climate (Kroth & Keeler, 2009), as well as the perception and the role of a manager's expectations (Berg, Dam, & Thierry, 2009). It was further found that managers with a non-defensive approach have a positive effect on engagement (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011).

Research has suggested that workplace climates that are positive, authentic and supportive all work to enhance engagement within the organisation (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Culture, as an organisational variable, is often outside an employee's direct line of control but often lies within the manager's or leader's sphere of influence, which suggests a conceptual link between leader behaviour and engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2011). A leader's conscious choice to focus on bettering engagement is thought of as a positive antecedent to the development of engagement.

Conceptually, hygiene factors extrinsic to the employee are a potential condition for engagement at an organisational level (Shuck et al., 2011). 'Hygiene factors' refers to factors such as reasonable work conditions, fair pay, reasonable degree of security, and high levels of trust with one's manager

or leader (Hertzberg, 1959, 1968). When these hygiene factors are not met, for example if employees do not believe they have a safe working environment, reasonable work conditions, or are not being paid fairly, engagement will most likely not develop (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Ironically, most companies are known to focus their HR efforts and interventions on the base of the pyramid (Figure 1), but it is critical that business focus on the top of the pyramid as these are the factors that will differentiate an organisation from other companies. Factors such as work-life support, diversity/inclusion and flexibility are often overlooked but are critical components for building a highly engaged and committed workforce (Richman, 2006).

Therefore from what has been previously discussed, one can see the importance of implementing interventions structured on engagement within organisation today. Conducting a study on HR practitioners' experiences of engagement will help inform researchers as to whether the engagement interventions being implemented within their organisation are aligned with what current literature says are successful engagement interventions, or if they are not effective engagement interventions at all.

2.3. Interventions and engagement

Firstly, the characteristics of interventions will be discussed; secondly, the levels of intervention strategies will be addressed; thirdly, the aims of intervention strategies; and lastly, the impact of engagement interventions will be discussed.

2.3.1. Characteristics of interventions

Not all employees have the same sources of motivation or can be influenced to initiate action and change their behaviour by the same factors (Havenga, et al., 2011). Engagement is an individual construct, and if it does not lead to specific business results, it must therefore firstly have an impact on individual-level outcomes (Havenga et al., 2011). Saying this brings to light the fact that motivating employees effectively, sustaining improved performance and initiating change remains among the biggest challenges in today's working world (Havenga et al., 2011). Factors that contribute to an employee's level of engagement are specific to each unique individual. It therefore becomes imperative that leaders are able to identify the factors that contribute to engagement. They must be able to enhance and maintain these factors at group and individual level (Harter et al., 2002).

Bakker and Geurts (2004) pointed out that for employees to avoid exhaustion, job demands must be reduced or redesigned by means of interventions. From a pathogenic and a fortigenic perspective,

engagement and burnout are specific focus areas for intervention and research (Maslach, et al., 2001). According to Burke (2005) the purpose of an intervention is the most important aspect of intervention research and should aim at the evaluation or the generation of knowledge. A good definition of an intervention was provided by French and Bell (1999) who explained an intervention to be a set of structured activities aiming at individual development and organisational improvement. Elements of an intervention include activities such as an event that has happened within the organisation and includes interviews, questionnaires, methods and different activities (a single or an overall improvement plan), and collaboration between client and organisation (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997). An alternative definition of an organisational intervention is that the latter is a planned, theory-based behavioural action that aims to improve employee well-being and health through changing the way work is organised, managed and designed (Giga, Noblet, Faragher, & Cooper, 2003; La Montagne, Keegel, Louie, Ostry, & Landsbergis, 2007; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

According to French and Bell (1999) four characteristics of interventions in general (structured activities aiming at individual development and organisational improvement) are: (1) intervention activities are an additional activity to the organisation's normal activities; (2) intervention activities are structured according to the organisation's overall strategy. This strategy involves compiling the the goals of the change effort, the nature of the problem of the client system, the readiness of the organisation to take on the change, the intervention will bring in the internal and external resources; (3) intervention activities imply the planning and executing of specific actions and the relation of the consequences of these actions. Observable, measurable and explicit objectives and goals are developed as part of the action programme and diagnostic activities precede these interventions; (4) multiple interventions are required if a system-wide change is to be successful. In summary, interventions seek to change certain aspects of the organisation, and improve the overall health and functioning of the organisation (Burke, 2005).

2.3.2 Levels of intervention strategies

According to Kompier and Cooper (1999) there are three levels of intervention strategies that deal with work-related well-being, specifically work engagement, burnout and stress. These are primary, secondary and tertiary strategies. Primary level interventions are concerned mainly with eliminating and modifying stressors in the workplace in order to adapt the environment to better suit or fit the individual. Primary level interventions could include (Giga et al., 2003a):

- a) Sharing in organisational goals to enable employees to share in the success of the organisation and take ownership in the quality of work the organisation produces. Specific

interventions can include a rewarding work environment, characterised by a positive work climate, where employees have the authority and freedom to make decisions to do their jobs well, where employee are recognised, and encouraged to look for better and more innovative ways of doing things and where management creates a motivating climate;

- b) Career development to provide employees with opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills (Roberts & Davenport, 2002);
- c) Selection and placement of individuals to ensure that the individuals recruited have the correct skills necessary to carry out the job tasks;
- d) Training and educational programmes to teach more innovative ways of doing things (Bunce & West, 1996).

Secondary interventions focus mainly on the individual, and are concerned with increasing the awareness and extending the physical and psychological resources of employees to enable them to decrease the damaging effects of stress and to handle stress in a more effective way, which in turn enhances engagement. Secondary interventions aim at the level of the individual's interaction with his work and consist of three types: somatic, cognitive and multimodal methods (Le Fevre, Kolt, & Matheny, 2006). The somatic type includes relaxation techniques such as biofeedback and breathing techniques. The cognitive type includes using techniques involving an individual's mind, such as affirmations and thought stopping. The multimodal technique combines both the cognitive and somatic types (Le Fevre et al., 2006).

Tertiary level interventions are targeted at the individual, but specifically in their role as being recuperative rather than preventative. For example, counselling is an effective method in driving the psychological well-being of employees, and has quite considerable cost benefits as it decreases the amount of sick leave taken (Kompier & Cooper, 1999). Cooper and Cartwright (1994) have indicated that stress management training in the form of time management, cognitive skill development, relaxation training and stress counselling all have an important role to play in enhancing the individual's physical and psychological resources.

According to Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001), the most effective intervention strategy on a tertiary level is an employee assistance programme (EAP). An EAP is a programmatic intervention at the workplace. It is usually aimed at the individual employee and uses behavioural science knowledge and methods to recognise and control specific work- and non-work-related problems (Berridge & Cooper, 1994). Examples of tertiary level interventions are (Giga et al., 2003a):

- a) Cognitive behaviour therapy which involves an attempt to change employee's thought process to enable the employee to positively accept unpleasant circumstances;

- b) Trauma debriefing – this focuses on the rehabilitation of employees who have suffered a traumatic incident;
- c) Support groups who provide a supportive environment and reduce the stress levels caused by their work roles;
- d) Counselling and therapy to focus on the rehabilitation of employees who have suffered from the extreme consequences of stress.

Table 2.2.

The three levels of interventions that promote work-related well-being (Jorgensen, 2006):

<u>Model</u>	<u>Primary Interventions</u>	<u>Secondary Interventions</u>	<u>Tertiary Interventions</u>
Work engagement and burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wellness surveys to assess the levels of burnout and work engagement ▪ Train managers to deal with work engagement and burnout ▪ Performance management ▪ Review job and personal resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wellness centres (gymnasium) ▪ Relaxation, meditation, biofeedback ▪ Workshops (stress prevention, burnout, work engagements, resilience, time management, conflict management, goal setting, change management, interpersonal skills, assertiveness) ▪ Training or education programmes ▪ Coaching ▪ Workshops to change perceptions of stressors ▪ Trauma management workshops ▪ Workshops in time management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support groups ▪ Employee assistance programme (counselling and medical treatment) ▪ Burnout and ill health reintegration training ▪ Coaching to decrease disengagement ▪ Post-traumatic stress interventions (eg trauma debriefing) ▪ Counselling (cognitive behaviour therapy) to deal with burnout
Ill health and organisational commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance management ▪ Implement a wellness and employee health policy 		
Job demands and job resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisation diagnosis 		

2.3.3 Aims of intervention strategies

An intervention strategy aims to promote work-related well-being, which in turn affects engagement. The strategy is guided by the following principles (Jorgensen, 2006):

1. It should be problem-focused and holistic;
2. It should take into account the people who are responsible for the problems and solutions;
and
3. It should include promotional, preventative and curative strategies.

These principles will now be further discussed.

Principle 1: Problem-focused and holistic. Interventions should be founded in risk assessment and evaluation to ensure that real problems are attended to. Kompier (2003) stated that it is of significant importance to learn about the well-being and health of employees through risk assessment. The systematic causes of health and well-being problems should be investigated and the intervention should be determined to fit the problems identified (Jorgensen, 2006). A comprehensive model such as the Comprehensive Model of Burnout and Work Engagement could be used (Jackson, Rothman, & Vijver, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The model combines research findings on engagement and burnout with situational causes and outcomes. The main assumption of the model is that two underlying processes exist, firstly, a motivational process that is driven by the availability of job resources in which engagement plays a key role, and secondly, an effort-driven energetic process in which burnout plays a key role that can lead to negative health outcomes. Positive (engagement) and negative (burnout) psychological states play similar roles in very different processes. Engagement plays a mediating role in the motivational process that is driven by available job resources and could lead to increased organisational commitment. Burnout on the other hand plays a mediating role in an effort-based energetic process that is driven by high job demands, and can lead to ill health. Bakker and Geurts (2004) state that this is a dual-purpose model that can be used for workplace interventions aimed at promoting employees' health and addressing psychological well-being. Interventions should be more effective and successful if they are tailored to accord with the specific job characteristics of the organisation.

One reason many interventions fail is because they address the negative side of work-related well-being, ie ill health (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). According to Le Fevre et al. (2006) the eustress rather than the distress interpretation of the employee task environment should be encouraged by helping employees achieve a more positive interpretation and reaction to their task environment.

Principle 2: Responsibility for problems and solutions: When deciding on interventions within an organisation it is necessary to determine who is responsible for the problem and the solution. By combining the two aspects, one can identify four models of helping and coping. These four models include the enlightenment, compensatory, moral and medical models (Meyer, 2003). Employees in the compensatory model recognise external sources that generate problems, but they take responsibility to find solutions (Meyer, 2003). Employees in the enlightenment model often blame themselves for the problems, but are powerless in finding the solutions. They look for the right person to show them what the solution is, which in turn can lead to disillusionment (Meyer, 2003). Employees in the moral model take high responsibility for solutions and problems, and even though they are highly valuable, they often run the risk of becoming highly stressed or burnt-out and being burdened with other people's problems (Meyer, 2003). Employees who occupy the medical model often feel powerless and blame their problems on the situation or on others; they take little responsibility in looking for solutions to their problems (Meyer, 2003).

Interventions are usually structured at three different levels, namely individual, individual/organisational and organisational level (Giga et al. 2003a). Individual interventions aim specifically at reducing stress, which can in turn enhance engagement, and provide employees with skills to understand stress and pressure (Giga et al., 2003a). The individual/organisational level concentrates on issues related to the interface between individuals and their work, and ensures that employees can do all the work expected of them. Organisational level interventions concentrate on issues such as policies and procedures that prevent employee stress organisation-wide (Giga et al., 2003a). Interventions focused on the individual often fail to reduce stress due to senior management failing to take the necessary responsibility (Giga et al., 2003a).

According to Kompier (2003), it is necessary to recruit individuals who have sufficient responsibility and power to look after the well-being and health of employees. Employees should be asked for their inputs into bettering the current organisational procedures and practices. Interventions can then be tailored to address individual desires and needs. The support of top management is essential when promoting organisational well-being (Jorgensen, 2006).

Principle 3: Preventative, promotional and curative levels: It is evident in research that prevention is better than cure (Kompier, 2003). Primary level interventions at organisational level refer to policies and procedures that are targeted at preventing stress, which in turn increases engagement (Giga et al., 2003a). The development and evaluation of organisational interventions appear to be hampered by issues of control, power and ethics. Changes at organisational level may disrupt organisational functioning and issues of control, thereby reducing the possible effect of these interventions (Dewe, 1994).

2.3.4 Impact of engagement interventions

According to Murphy (1995), HR departments have a lot to offer in the primary intervention stage, and consultation should take place between the employee assistance programmes and the HR department. Contributions from the HR departments include adopting feasible work schedules, organisational change strategies, and the revision of supervisory training programmes. It was also found by Cooper and Cartwright (1994) that policies related to job availability and training of health care are likely to affect the work performance and job satisfaction of employees. All of the latter affect engagement in the workplace. These outcomes may also influence the quality of candidates who are recruited, and the ability to retain employees once they are employed (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

The objective of a study conducted by Havenga et al. (2011) was to measure engagement before and after a business and culture intervention in the workplace. What was concluded was that the results showed no statistical significant difference between the mean employee engagement before and after the business and culture intervention took place. Ultimately, the intervention was ineffective. This study aims to provide insight into the possible reasons why these interventions may not be achieving the desired outcomes.

Further to this, a study conducted by Jorgensen (2006) found similar results. Jorgensen (2006) focused specifically on interventions that were implemented to address the levels of engagement and burnout of SAPS (South African Police Service) members. The interventions consisted of a set of structured activities that should have led to individual development and organisational improvement. It was found that there was no significant difference in work-related well-being and engagement of the SAP members after the interventions were implemented, hence the intervention did not achieve the desired results. This provides further evidence that it is important to explore what HR practitioners' experiences of engagement are, as they are responsible for implementation of engagement strategies and interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

Jorgensen's (2006) study suggested that an intervention consists of a set of structured activities which aim to better individual development and organisational improvement. Further to this, an intervention may consist of activities that involve interviews and questionnaires with different levels of activities, ie a single task or a plan to improve the organisation overall (Jorgensen, 2006). Jorgensen (2006) established that certain principles underlie an effective intervention programme and include aspects such as using interventions as an overall strategy in addition to the normal organisational activities, provided the intervention is aligned to the goals of the change effort. It is important that the organisation is ready to be part of the intervention and that the necessary internal

and external resources are available (Jorgensen, 2006). Effective interventions involve a change agent who has a specific plan (Jorgensen, 2006). Valid information should be readily available; there must be a high degree of ownership by the organisation if the interventions are to be effective (Jorgensen, 2006). Interventions will therefore aim to change some aspects of the organisation, and to improve the overall functioning and health of the organisation (Jorgensen, 2006).

In order to develop observable, measurable and explicit objectives for the action plan, it is of vital importance that diagnostic activities in the form of risk assessments precede interventions (Jorgensen, 2006). By obtaining an analysis of both the negative and the positive aspects of the organisation, multiple interventions can be planned to ensure that an organisation-wide change is a successful one. Multiple interventions will consist of primary, secondary and tertiary interventions, as discussed earlier (Kompier & Cooper, 1999).

A study conducted by Rothman and Rothman (2010) concluded that various aspects must be addressed in organisations in order to enhance engagement of employees. Firstly, interventions should provide variety, autonomy and learning opportunities in their jobs, and be structured to ensure work-role fit of employees. If the latter is in place, it can lead to experiences of enhanced engagement and psychological meaningfulness. Secondly, interventions should be implemented to accomplish objectives such as fostering good relationships with supervisors, ensuring organisational support, enhancing role clarity, bettering communication providing role clarity, and participation in decision-making. Thirdly, advancement opportunities such as training, promotion and remuneration should be a priority for management and HR practitioners (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

HRD practice is introduced as a way to reduce workplace incivility and to increase engagement through designing and implementing training and development activities, or interventions such as diversity awareness, netiquette workshop, programme interventions and conflict management (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

In concluding engagement and interventions, there is an expectation that the purpose of an intervention or intervention process should generally be positive, progressive or helpful. But if the process is not managed well it may lead to disengagement (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Even if the employees understand the purpose of the intervention, if those employees cannot find meaning in the intervention process, disappointing results can be expected (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Therefore it is of vital importance that HR practitioners communicate the purpose of the intervention in a way that creates meaning for employee in order to reach the ultimate goal of bettering engagement in the workplace (Shuck & Rose, 2013).

2.4. HR Practitioners and Engagement

Unfortunately there is very limited literature on HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions in South Africa or abroad, which means there was a gap in knowledge and literature when searching for literature on experiences of HR practitioners or any other practitioner (IO psychologists) when implementing engagement interventions or any other intervention. The following search engines were searched: Ebscohost, Sabinet and various other journals. However, , the role of an HR practitioner in the implementation of engagement interventions will be discussed below, as this will have an effect on how HR practitioners experience the implementation of engagement interventions.

Engagement is essential to the well-being, health and success of individuals and the organisation as the work environment becomes more information-driven, leaner and competitive (Wollard, 2011). HR practitioners and researchers have a great opportunity and big challenge in the years to come (Wollard, 2011). Strategic HR development should contribute to the organisation's competitive advantage by looking at enhancing the unique capabilities and skills of its employees in a way that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Garavan, 2007). It was suggested by Macey and Schneider (2008) that engaged employees are the key to obtaining competitive advantage. Therefore it is vital that an engaged workforce be on the top of the list of priorities to develop in an organisation. HR practitioners should be the leaders in creating a more engaged workforce (Wollard, 2011).

HR practitioners can start by asking a few easy questions to determine the organisation's level of engagement. These are suggested by Wollard (2011):

- Is there someone who is responsible for developing HR within the company? Do they have all the necessary resources and power needed to do the latter?
- Does the organisation care about its people? What is the evidence of this?
- How much common ground is there between management and employees?
- Is there a platform for employees to voice their frustrations, feelings, companies and concerns in a way that they believe can lead to positive changes (Cusack, 2009)?
- What evidence is there of commitment to engagement in the traditions, stories, mission and values of the organisation?

Strategic HR practitioners should focus on evaluating the linkage between HR development systems, organisational strategies and policies and procedures, and should take into account the perspectives of multiple stakeholders as well as focus on contributions on multiple levels of analysis

(Garavan, 2007). Engagement should be tailored for each organisation's unique environment (Wollard, 2011). Each organisation needs to arrive at a common understanding of what engagement means for its workplace (Wollard, 2011). Once this has happened it is possible to address strategically the supportive policies and practices, systems, supportive strategies and expectations, frustrations, weaknesses that are hampering employees from engaging fully (Cusack, 2009).

According to research by Shuck and Reio (2011), entire companies and international consulting groups advertise commitment to the development, diagnosis and evaluation of solutions or interventions to better employee engagement. But few share a common measurement, definition, application or approach to engagement (Wollard, 2011). Employees need to believe that their management and leaders can develop engagement and that HR practitioners have the necessary data to depict whether the development has occurred (Wollard, 2011). HR practitioners should be at the forefront of developing and encouraging communication within organisations and must be able to recognise when engagement levels are low (Wollard, 2011). Many HR practitioners use employee engagement models in an attempt to develop employees into being more efficient and effective in their roles. By doing the latter it will allow for greater organisational benefits and better organisational performance (Crabtree, 2005; Echols, 2005; Gubman, 2004).

As HR practitioners are leaders of change in organisations, HR leaders need to be aware of the building blocks of organisational change and should be very aware of the signs of burnout that could lead to decreased engagement within the organisation (Wollard, 2011). By being aware of what factors can decrease engagement, the organisation can lead enhanced intervention strategies that are as unique as the individuals engaging them (Wollard, 2011). HR practitioners must become advocates and give individuals the opportunity to raise their voices to bring to light any aspects of policies, politics and organisational life that lead to an erosion of employee well-being (Wollard, 2011). But HR practitioners cannot better engagement alone. It was found in a study conducted by Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby (2013) that positive experiences of HR management practices alone are insufficient to generate a high level of engagement and performance. But with a combination of positive perceived line manager behaviour and positive experiences of HR practices there can be a more engaged and higher-performing workforce. Collaboration between both parties, employer and employees, will enable an effective implementation of HR interventions, which will be positively perceived and will most likely lead to better engagement within the organisation (Alfes et al., 2013).

Aggarwal, Datta, and Bhargava (2007) stated that job characteristics that encompass challenge, autonomy and variety are more likely to produce psychological meaningfulness. Psychological meaningfulness was found to be the strongest predictor of employee engagement. It mediates the

role between work-role fit and employee engagement (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Because job characteristics are defined by organisations' HR practices, HR practitioners will have a big role to play in ensuring a good work-role fit, which in turn enhances engagement.

Likewise, performance management processes and practices that focus on the roles and responsibilities of individual employees provide conditions for engagement when the implied identities of these roles are psychologically appealing to the employee. This identity is also known to help an employee feel valuable to the organisation, which in turn leads to increased engagement (Aggarwal et al., 2007).

Training and development is another important area in HR practices which contributes to employee engagement (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Learning new skills may renew an interest in aspects of the job that may have not been meaningful earlier. Retention, another function of human resources practitioners and one which has recently become a critical priority for business, also contributes to engagement. Many managers are being trained on retention competencies in order to foster higher engagement and retention among team members (Aggarwal et al., 2007).

Rewards management, another significant function of HR practitioners, is said to have a major impact on employees' conceptions of their employment relationship. Rewards may not always refer to monetary rewards, and therefore organisations are looking at innovative ways of rewarding employees, eg segmenting the workforce on the basis of function or skills, introducing variable pay, etc. In the economic conditions where employees may not be engaged but still remain in their organisations, these tactics of reward management are meant to enhance engagement and retention (Aggarwal et al., 2007).

Employees need to believe that their leaders and HR practitioners know how to develop engagement within the organisation; and HRD practitioners need to be in possession of data that can demonstrate whether or not the development of employees has occurred (Wollard, 2011). HR practitioners should be at the forefront of encouraging communication within their organisations and promoting engagement within organisations. (Wollard, 2011). As HR practitioners are leaders of change in organisations, HRD leadership must be aware of the building blocks of organisations and be able recognise signs of employee burnout and organisational change cynicism (Wollard, 2011).

Shuck et al. (2010) proposed the following three propositions as implications for further development in HRD research and practice:

Proposal 1: Environment and person interact to create engagement or disengagement.

The environment consists of people (supervisors or colleagues who work in the environment), the structure of the organisation, the physical layout of the workplace, organisational procedures and policies, and elements such as co-operation, trust, and perceived levels of safety. The individual employee has a unique set of characteristics such as openness to learning and worldviews and a desire for challenge (Macey & Schneider, 2008). All these factors come together to create the organisation's culture. Organisational culture is defined as an employee's perception of the behaviours, procedures and policies that support the organisation (Patterson et al., 2005). What is clear from Shuck et al. (2010) is that culture is constructed or developed on a micro level. Culture is developed from the employee's unique perspective during daily interactions at work and is used on a macro level to make sense of the beliefs, values and standards of the organisation (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). The way the employee interprets and experiences the organisation's standards, beliefs and values is the direct output of engagement (Shuck et al., 2010). Culture provides clues or standards to the way employees must behave, and what is acceptable and unacceptable. (Shuck et al., 2010).

What this means for HR practitioners is that organisations could work better together to understand their employees' needs by conducting a needs analysis (Shuck et al., 2010). A needs analysis systematically examines an organisation's strengths and weaknesses in order to determine and meet existing challenges and make improvements for the future (King & Stevahn, 2009). HRD strategies aimed at bettering personal and environmental factors should be tailored to the culture and the goals of each organisation. Examples of broad strategies include encouraging managers to hold one-on-one meetings that are driven by the employee and not the manager, enhancing communication to be more transparent and open, knowledge sharing and group collaboration, and the creation of procedures and processes that encourage team assignments or projects (Shuck et al., 2010).

Proposal 2: An employee's manager plays a critical role in developing engagement

A manager is one of the most influential people in the employee's work-life (Arakawa & Greenberg, 2007). Therefore his ability to influence an employee's engagement is great (Shuck et al., 2010). Environments where employees feel cared about and valued will result in a safe and meaningful workplace where engagement can thrive (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). What this means for HR practitioners is that they should assist organisations in working towards improving management's skill-set through careful recruitment of employees (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). For example, selection processes should start with a conversation with key stakeholders about what abilities, skills and

knowledge a manager needs to have in order to be successful in a position (Shuck et al., 2010). Examples of characteristics to look for in managers when recruiting may include: a creator of a humanistic work environment, collaborative developer of organisational values, mission and vision, builder of capabilities, people developer, initiator of organisation-wide communication, utilizer of strategic data, role model of emotional intelligence and risk taker and change agent (Payne, Cangemi, Mehleakamp, & Fuqua, 1998). In addition to this, managers' selection processes should be developed to attract talent who are not only willing to serve as knowledge experts but are also able to mentor and explain processes to employees, and to develop and maintain good relationships with those whom they manage (Shuck et al., 2010).

Accountability by managers when it comes to promoting and developing employee engagement can be developed by linking performance appraisals to data-driven metric systems that include equally weighted measures of the organisation's culture performance and business performance (Shuck et al., 2010). Moreover, a manager's performance appraisal should not only be linked to what they have accomplished but also to the way they have accomplished their objectives. For organisations that chose to use this type of engagement strategy, two pieces of communication take on a greater importance (Shuck et al., 2010):

1. Organisations must provide managers with all the resources and tools they need to improve low-level engagement, such as access to training and development, access to HR practitioners or time away from day-to-day responsibilities to focus on getting better (Harter et al., 2002); and
2. It must be communicated that performance appraisals are to be used in a constructive and not a destructive manner. Ultimately, they should be used to enhance engagement within the organisation.

Proposal 3: Personality can affect engagement, however, everyone can engage.

Employees view their work in their own special way (Shuck et al., 2010). Each employee, based on unique circumstances and experiences, holds certain assumptions and has various personality characteristics that result in their behaving in a certain way at work (Reeve, 2001). Their characteristics play an important role in the overall creation of engagement at work (Shuck et al., 2010). No matter what the organisational policy says about leaving their personal lives at home, employees tend to bring their whole selves to work (Shuck et al., 2010). This makes every employee unique. But engagement is not for a few employees who have the right combination of personality characteristics and who are fortunate enough to work for a company that strives to develop engaging cultures (Shuck et al., 2010). Engagement is theoretically possible at every organisation

and with every employee (Shuck et al., 2010). For example, it was suggested by Macey et al. (2009) that there are three general requirements to develop engagement within every employee:

1. The motivation to engage;
2. The capacity to engage; and
3. The freedom to engage

The motivation to engage concerns the communication of the job's roles and responsibilities, and the degree of challenging work the job provides to the employee (Macey et al., 2009). Work is an engaging experience when an individual feels his or her job is challenging, meaningful and interesting (Kahn, 1990), and provides freedom to make decisions on how work gets accomplished, and not just on what work gets done (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Organisations and HR practitioners can contribute to motivating employees through helping aligning employee values through recruitment processes, team meetings, focus groups and treating employees with respect (Kroth & Keeler, 2009).

The capacity to engage concerns the motivation that naturally comes from a sense of autonomy and competence, and can be developed (Maslow, 1970). Employees need to feel a sense of value, purpose and competence in their work role. Organisations, through the assistance of HR practitioners, can enhance competency and autonomy development by informing employees of what is expected of them in terms of performance and their day-to-day duties, providing them with the necessary resources to complete their work, and following up with focused and well-communicated feedback (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Harter et al., 2002; Kahn 1990).

The freedom to engage concerns the overall safety of the environment and the decision the employee makes about their safety when performing certain actions at work (Kahn, 1990). Organisations can free employees to engage by behaving in ways that lead to building trust such as demonstrating integrity, behaving consistently and communicating with transparency (Kroth and Keller, 2009; Macey et al., 2009). Trust is a result of meaningful, available and safe places of work and this in turn leads to freedom to engage (Kahn, 1990). What this means for HR practitioners is that by focusing on the first two propositions an organisation (Shuck, et al., 2010):

1. Sets the foundation for a culture of engagement; and
2. Provides all the necessary resources and tools for managers to support their employees' development towards engagement.

Once the environmental conditions for the development of engagement are present, the last barrier

is the employee's own personal barriers or limitations (Shuck et al., 2010). In order to help employees overcome limitations, organisations can place a priority on defining, attracting and retaining talent that has a good job fit (Shuck et al., 2010).

In concluding, HR practitioners have a very important role to play in many areas of the organisation as discussed, all of which have an impact on engagement. Their role, along with management's role, will have a direct influence on whether an engagement intervention is successful or not.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature review established that engagement is a critical element in today's working world. It can lead to increased productivity, retention, and reduced turnover (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). However, it has been reported in research that engagement is on the decline and there is a decrease in engagement among employees (Richman, 2006). This could be due to the fact that many engagement interventions are failing (Jorgensen, 2006).

Further, it was found that in many organisations HR practitioners are responsible for the implementation of engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). In light of the latter, possible reasons why engagement is decreasing and interventions structured around engagement are not achieving the desired results were discussed. Through the literature review, possible individual antecedents and organisational antecedents were highlighted that could lead to increased engagement within an organisation, provided the engagement interventions are implemented in an effective manner. The different levels of engagement interventions were discussed, as well as the HR practitioner's role in implementing these engagement interventions. Ultimately the literature review provided the necessary insight into engagement interventions that can assist in answering the research question of 'What are HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution?'

Chapter 3 will follow and will detail the research design and the specific methodology used for this study. The latter will include the research approach, research strategy, research method, research setting, sampling, data collection, recording of data, ethical considerations, data analysis and reporting. Lastly, the findings of the study will be discussed and elaborated upon in relation to current literature. Suggestions for further research will be put forward.

CHAPTER 3 – ARTICLE

HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS WITH A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Orientation: This study explored human resources practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

Research purpose: This general aim of this research is to explore human resources practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

Motivation for the study: Human resources practitioners play a significant role in enhancing engagement, and therefore it is vital that when they are implementing engagement interventions they understand if these interventions are achieving the desired results. There is a lack of research into human resources practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution, especially in the South African context. This necessitates the present study.

Research design, approach and method: A qualitative approach, informed by the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, was followed. Descriptive and exploratory data was collected from a purposeful sample of five participants who were human resources practitioners in a human

resources department within a financial institution. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore their experiences as human resources practitioners of engagement interventions within this financial institution.

Main findings: The study revealed a number of key findings, which included that human resources practitioners in this study generally understood and have experienced what engagement is and what an engagement intervention consisted of, ie tools used to assess engagement, and their role in the implementation and facilitation of engagement interventions. The latter was consistent with literature. However, some participants had limited knowledge of engagement and engagement interventions, which is very concerning as they are the drivers and facilitators of engagement interventions, which could result in engagement interventions not being successfully implemented.

Practical implications: This study has given the necessary insight into how human resources practitioners understand and have experienced engagement and engagement interventions and their specific role in the implementation of these engagement interventions. As many I/O psychologists today may act in a human resources practitioner role in their day-to-day activities, and as they are seen as leaders and primary role models for change within their organisations, it is important that they understand and have insight into what makes an engagement intervention successful and what factors can lead to the success of an engagement intervention.

Contribution or value-add: This research will help provide an insight into human resources practitioners' understanding and experiences of engagement and engagement interventions, and may provide further knowledge of what makes a successful engagement intervention.

Key words: Engagement antecedents, engagement intervention models, and hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Engagement has become a very important topic, not only in the academic community but also with practitioners in organisations (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Tremendous pressure is being put on organisations today to improve their overall performance and increase their competitiveness locally and internationally in the continually changing world of work (Ndlovu & Parumasur, 2005). Globalisation has increased the workforce's mobility, and as a result employees are now expecting more from their employers than ever before (Burke & Cooper, 2009).

In order for companies to gain a competitive advantage they need to keep up with their competitors, and to do this they need to put employee retention at the forefront of their organisation as well as ensure they attract top talent (Subrahmanian, 2014). Engagement was identified as one of the main drivers in retaining staff, and in motivating staff to remain in their organisation (Subrahmanian, 2014). Engagement has been found to increase productivity, efficiencies and effectiveness in attaining the company's mission and vision (Subrahmanian, 2014). Companies with the highest engagement levels have a four-year average total shareholder return (TSR) of 20 percent or higher, which is nearly triple that of businesses with lower levels of engagement (Richman, 2006). Gallup studies estimated that highly engaged employees account for as much as 90 percent of a company's overall productivity (Richman, 2006).

What is concerning is that it was found in a survey conducted by Gallup that approximately 26% of the United States (US) workforce is engaged. Ultimately, engagement is something an organisation undermines or enhances; the latter is influenced by management practices, demographics and the feature of personality (Richman, 2006). If a company is not trying to intentionally increase organisational engagement and commitment, chances are it is minimizing or even crushing engagement within the organisation (Richman, 2006).

Pech and Slade (2006) found that an organisation cannot afford to not use its employees' energy to full advantage. Engagement was found to be the critical factor in this underlying energy and the payoff of having an energized workforce is enormous. An energized workforce can bring increased engagement, retention, and productivity which results in reduced staff turnover (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). But it has been reported in research that engagement within organisations is decreasing and there is increased disengagement among employees today (Richman, 2006). This could be explained by the fact that many engagement interventions implemented within organisations today are not achieving the desired results (Jorgensen, 2006).

HR practitioners (HR) are known in organisations to be responsible for the facilitation and implementation of engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). As a result, possible reasons why engagement may be decreasing and interventions structured around engagement may not be achieving the desired results or may be failing, may be due to HR practitioners' not clearly understanding engagement as a concept or how to implement an engagement intervention effectively. This study aims to explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution, which in turn may provide the necessary insight into why engagement interventions are succeeding or failing in organisations around the business world today. Engagement, engagement interventions and an HR practitioner's role will be discussed and will inform the discussion of the findings.

Research purpose:

This general aim of this research is to explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

The specific aims relating to the interpretative study were the following:

- To gain a better understanding as to how HR practitioners experience engagement interventions within an financial institution;
- To provide possible insight as to why current interventions structured around engagement are successful or failing, based on an HR practitioner's experience;
- To make recommendations on how to better implement engagement interventions in order to increase the likelihood of success when implementing engagement interventions within organisations; and
- To make recommendations for further research about HR practitioners' and I/O psychologists' experiences of engagement interventions.

Trends from research literature

Trends from research literature that are relevant to this study include engagement, engagement interventions and HR practitioners' role in relation to engagement and engagement interventions. These will now be discussed.

Engagement

As a result of the competitive global economy, the landscape in companies today has changed tremendously from what it was a decade ago. (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). In order to compete on a global scale today, organisations need to maximise the inputs of their employees and business needs (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Employees need to be cognitively and emotionally committed to their company, their customers and their work (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). According to Macey and Schneider (2008), an engaged workforce has been known to contribute significantly to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage. Engagement has been known to have a determining effect on employee outcomes, financial performance and organisational success (Bates, 2004; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Richman, 2006).

At the same time, engagement in organisations has shown to be on the decline (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). This was evident in a study conducted by Bates (2004) in the US where the majority of workers were found to be not fully engaged. The latter has resulted in an engagement gap, which is costing US businesses around \$300 billion a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004). It has been estimated that approximately 20% of employees are highly engaged and 20% are actively disengaged (Attridge, 2009). Similar findings were reported by Rothmann (2011), but engagement levels were found to vary across different occupations and organisations. Therefore it becomes imperative that managers prioritise engagement, given that disengagement is a major factor in employees' lack of commitment in organisations today (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Engagement has been defined in many ways in literature. Engagement was first defined by Kahn (1990), who defined work engagement as the expression of oneself through one's work and other employee-role activities. According to Kahn (1990), three psychological conditions, namely psychological meaningfulness, availability and safety lead to enhanced engagement within the workplace. Psychological meaningfulness refers to a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment for what one puts in, ie through one's performance at work. Psychological availability can be described as a sense of possessing the physical, emotional and psychological resources needed to deliver in a specific work role. Psychological safety can be articulated as a sense of being able to show and employ oneself without the fear of negative consequences to one's status or self-image at work. Further to this, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) conceptualised engagement by indicating the importance of people bringing one's emotional, cognitive and physical resources to work in order to engage oneself at work. Engagement was further defined by Naude and Rothmann (2006) in a South African context, as an energetic state in which an employee is committed to excellent performance at work and is confident in his or her effectiveness.

A definition of engagement that is widely used in the HR field is provided by Shuck and Wollard (2010), who define engagement as an employee's behavioural, cognitive and emotional state directed towards achieving the organisation's desired outcomes.

Havenga, Stanz, Visagie and Karin (2011) concluded that it is important that leaders determine what organisational factors contribute to engagement, as this in turn will enable the organisation to put measures in place to enhance these factors both on a group and individual level. Antecedents that affect engagement include factors such as an employee's direct line manager. The latter is a very important antecedent, as an employer has the potential to provide the employee with a sense of meaningful work, a safe environment and the necessary resources to complete their work (Kahn, 1990). There are three levels of factors that cause high engagement (Richman, 2006). The first level includes threshold factors such as reasonable compensation and benefits, and safe working conditions. The second level refers to enabling factors such as rewards tied to contribution and skills development. The third level refers to commitment drivers which lead to full engagement of the employee, such as flexibility, job satisfaction, communication, diversity, work-life support, career advancement and management effectiveness. All these factors or levels must be achieved in order to obtain a real competitive advantage over competitors (Richman, 2006).

Numerous models have been used to measure factors or antecedents of engagement. The Job Demands-Resources model assumes that every occupation has its own set of work characteristics associated with well-being (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). The model of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) suggests that job resources such as skill variety, performance feedback, social support from managers and colleagues and autonomy can lead to motivational processes that enhance engagement and ultimately result in increased performance. The Job Characteristics model can be utilised to identify top workplace factors that lead to peak performance within the workplace (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). The conceptual model developed by Wollard and Shuck (2011) identifies antecedents of engagement on two levels, individual and organisational antecedents.

Engagement interventions

Interventions have been used as a means to address elements in the workplace such as job demands and exhaustion (Bakker & Geurts, 2004). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) suggested that interventions can be used to address elements in the workplace such as work engagement and burnout. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) stated that it is of great importance that leaders within the organisation are able to identify factors that contribute to engagement, and further to this they must be able to enhance or maintain these factors on a group and individual level. This can be done

through interventions (Bakker & Geurts, 2004). An intervention was defined by French and Bell (1999) as a set of structured activities that aimed at individual development and organisational improvement. Elements of an intervention were described as activities, such as an event that has happened within the organisation. This event generally consisted of interviews, questionnaires, methods and different activities and collaboration between client and organisation (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997). Burke (2005) further defined an intervention's purpose to be the generation of knowledge and evaluations.

Interventions can take place on three levels, namely primary, secondary and tertiary strategies (Kompier & Cooper, 1999). These three levels of intervention strategies deal with work related well-being, specifically work engagement, burnout and stress. Primary level interventions are mainly concerned with eliminating and modifying stressors in the workplace in order to adapt the environment to better suit or fit the individual. Primary level interventions are interventions such as sharing organisational goals (which allows for better ownership of goals by employees), positive work climate, autonomy, rewarding work environment, employee recognition, innovation, career development and training (Giga, Cooper, & Faragher, 2003).

Secondary interventions focus mainly on the individual, which refers to individuals increasing their awareness and bettering their physical and psychological resources to decrease the effects of stress which can lead to increased engagement in the workplace (Le Fevre, Kolt, & Matheny, 2006). Individual employees could do the latter through relaxation techniques and positive affirmations (Le Fevre et al., 2006). Tertiary level interventions are also targeted at the individual, but focus more on the individual's role in the organisation as being recuperative rather than preventative. Examples of tertiary level interventions include counselling, stress management training, time management and cognitive skills development (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Kompier & Cooper, 1999).

An intervention strategy should aim to promote overall well-being within the organisation, which in turn has a positive effect on engagement (Jorgensen, 2006). Jorgensen (2006) proposed that an intervention should be guided by the following principles: it should be problem-focused and holistic, the stakeholders who are responsible for the problems and solutions should be taken into account, and, lastly, it should include promotional, preventative and curative intervention strategies.

Some intervention approaches, which are aimed specifically at improving engagement within organisations, can significantly improve engagement, which can result in reduced staff turnover and better retention of staff (Havenga, Stanz, Visagie, & Karin, 2011). But engagement interventions are not always successful – in a study conducted by Havenga et al. (2011), it was found that there was no statistical significant difference in the mean employee engagement before and after a business

and culture intervention was introduced. It was established that the engagement intervention failed. A similar study was conducted by Jorgensen (2006), where interventions were implemented to address the levels of engagement and burnout in the South African Police Service (SAPS). The pre- and post-measurement showed no significant difference in work-related well-being and engagement of the SAPS members (Jorgensen, 2006). This can be attributed to many factors, such as organisations getting the conceptualisation of engagement wrong (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Most engagement measures have failed to get the conceptualisation of engagement right; therefore measurement of engagement through interventions is done incorrectly (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Therefore, it becomes vital that one gets an insight into how HR practitioners experience engagement interventions, as in many cases they are responsible for the implementation of engagement interventions in organisations today (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

HR Practitioners' role

Unfortunately there is very limited literature on HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions in a South African and international context, which indicates a gap in knowledge and literature. The literature search was done through search engines such as Ebscohost, Sabinet and various journals. The literature search was widened to include not only the experiences of HR practitioners but those of any other practitioners, such as I/O psychologists, when implementing engagement interventions or any other intervention. But the research remained limited. The role of an HR practitioner in the implementation of engagement interventions will be discussed below as this will have an effect on how HR practitioners experience the implementation of engagement interventions.

To develop and support interventions and cultures that create favourable conditions for engagement in organisations today, it is of great importance that HR practitioners understand the nature of engagement and the possible antecedents and subsequent outcomes of engagement interventions (Shuck & Reio, 2011). Engagement has been associated with higher levels of overall revenue generation, profit and growth (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2009). Organisations are seeking new ways to embrace and enhance levels of engagement and they doing this through designing and development plans and surveying employees to find out what steps they need to take to enhance engagement (Ketter, 2008). Ultimately, HR practitioners who are able to identify potential antecedents of engagement in their organisations will be better able to provide viable strategies and interventions to stakeholders, to communicate a clearer vision and direction, and to identify possible challenges (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). HR practitioners should be able to contribute to organisations in a way that betters the organisation's competitive advantage; the latter can be done by looking at ways to enhance the unique skills and capabilities of its employees in a way that is difficult for

competitors to imitate (Garavan, 2007). HR practitioners and leaders should be at the forefront of developing an engaged workforce within the organisation (Wollard, 2011).

Today many organisational leaders are embracing engagement and are looking to HR practitioners to develop and support interventions that enhance engagement (Vance, 2006). Wollard (2011) reported that engagement interventions should be tailored to fit each organisation's unique environment, and that employees should reach a common understanding of what engagement means to their workplace. But it was noted in literature that HR practitioners cannot better engagement alone. Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby (2013) stated that positive experiences of HR management practices alone is not enough to generate high levels of performance and engagement. Support from line management and positive experiences of HR practice will ultimately lead to a higher-performing culture and increased engagement within an organisation.

HR practitioners play an important role in many HR practices to do with engagement and engagement interventions in organisations today. Specific areas where HR practitioners have a role to play in enhancing engagement will now be discussed. Firstly, job characteristics which are defined by HR policy and practices have an effect on an employee's overall role in the organisation. Job characteristics can determine the amount of challenge, autonomy and variety a role consists of, which has a direct impact on an employee's perceived psychological meaningfulness, which is one of the elements of engagement as per Kahn's (1990) definition (Aggarwal, Datta, & Bhargava, 2007). Secondly, the performance management process, which has a profound impact on an employee's responsibilities as per their role, also influences engagement directly. Further, the performance management process provides conditions for engagement between employer and employee, which has an impact on engagement within an organisation (Aggarwal et al., 2007). The latter has an influence on an employee's perception of how valuable they feel as an employee within the organisation and this has an effect on their level of engagement (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Thirdly, training and development, another important element of HR's practices, contribute significantly to overall engagement within the organisation (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Fourthly, retention is a critical factor of HR practices that can be used as an indicator of engagement and should be a critical priority for business to focus on (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Lastly, rewards management forms a big part of HR practices, as it plays a determining role in an employee's conception of their employee relationship (Aggarwal et al., 2007). To summarise, Wollard and Shuck (2011) stated that engagement plays an important role for all areas of HRD practice such as training and organisational learning, organisational development, career development, strategic change processes and performance management (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Shuck et al. (2010) made three propositions as implications for further development in HR

development research and practice. Proposal one refers to the work environment and the way people interact in order to create engagement or disengagement. This proposal refers to the organisational culture, which is defined as an employee's perception of the procedures, policies and behaviours that support the organisation (Patterson *et al.* 2005). The way an employee interprets and experiences the organisation's values, beliefs and standards has a direct output on engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). HR practitioners therefore need to work together with employer and employee by conducting a needs analysis (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Proposal two refers to an employee's manager playing a critical role in developing engagement; therefore HR practitioners need to upskill managers and to recruit managers with the correct skill set that can enhance engagement (Hoffman & Woehr, 2006). Lastly, proposal three refers to the fact that employees' personalities have an effect on engagement. But all employees have the ability to engage. HR practitioners should look at how they engage employees by assessing and addressing an employee's motivation to change (challenging work); capacity to change (competence), and lastly freedom to change (safety of the work environment) (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009).

HR practitioners play a very important role by developing their current knowledge on engagement and engagement interventions in order to be able to separate the sales pitches from the truth. Practitioners who learn how to differentiate between other practitioners' ideas, well researched information and well wrapped sales pitches will be far more effective in enhancing engagement (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Research problem and objectives

HR practitioners play a significant role in enhancing engagement interventions, and therefore it is vital that HR practitioners who are implementing current engagement interventions and strategies understand if these engagement interventions are achieving the desired results, which is to enhance engagement within the organisation, or whether their experiences are contributing to failed engagement interventions or successful interventions. By exploring HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution, especially in the South African context, this study may provide insight into engagement interventions and why some interventions succeed and why others fail.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research designs are procedures and plans for the research and range from decisions regarding the broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009).

Research design involves the intersection of strategies of inquiry, philosophical assumptions and specific methods (Creswell, 2009). The design is presented below according to the research approach and method used.

3.2.1 Research approach

The research approach this study made use of is a qualitative-explorative research approach. The interpretive research paradigm used for this study is hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on the way people relate to the world in which they exist and their consciousness thereof (Blaikie, 2007; Mason, 1996; Terre-Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006); whereas hermeneutics allows the researcher to enter into the life of the participant through a lens that is used to observe and understand the participant's life (Blaikie, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology is an ideographic method of qualitative inquiry which focuses on interpreting individuals' experiences. This allows for critical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Kawulich & Holland, 2012; Shaw, 2010).

This qualitative study aims to describe, explore and provide understanding of human interactions, meanings and different processes, which will enable the researcher to gather insight into how individuals experience a specific phenomenon in day-to-day life, such as the phenomenon presented in this study, HR practitioners experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution (Rynes, 2004). In order to achieve insight into and understand the complexity of this phenomenon, the qualitative explorative research approach informed by the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm best suits this study. To summarise, this study makes use of hermeneutic phenomenological assumptions stemming from the interpretive research orientation. Therefore the study relies on exploring the lived subjective experiences of the participants and their constructed meaning thereof.

3.2.2 Research strategy

The research strategy utilised was the qualitative-exploratory approach which consisted of conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews, which in turn led to the accumulation of rich data. A small sample of five employees from the HR department in the financial institution was purposively selected. A small sample was used, as qualitative and exploratory research typically does not draw random samples or large samples (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). The data analysis method used for this qualitative study was informed by Tesch's (1990) framework. Tesch's eight steps allow for a systematic process of analysing data (Creswell, 2009). An external transcriber and coder were used to ensure reliability and validity of the data presented in this study. Further to this, the external coder was used to ensure that the themes identified were co-agreed upon. The latter allows

for credibility of the data collected. A peer debriefer (my master's degree supervisor) was made use of to enhance the credibility and accuracy of the account. An independent transcriber was also made use of to minimise bias.

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling and data collection, data analysis methods and strategies used to ensure quality data were as follows.

3.3.1 Research setting

The research setting is a financial institution in the wealth and asset management industry. The organisation consists of approximately 670 employees to whom the HR practitioners in this study provide a support service. Semi-structured in-depth Interviews were conducted with HR practitioners who work in the human resources department in this financial institution. The HR practitioners are part of an HR consulting pillar of the HR department. Together with the learning and development team the whole HR department consists of approximately 15 individuals. The financial institution maintains a corporate environment that is governed by stringent rules and regulations according to the Financial Services Board (FSB). The financial institution is currently listed on the JSE and is a well-known investment company throughout South Africa.

3.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Qualitative studies accept researcher subjectivity as something that cannot be completely removed from the research process as the researcher is the research instrument in the gathering of the data (Maree, 2010). As I am conducting the research, it is important, especially in qualitative research that I identify my own assumptions, personal values and biases and the outset of the study (Creswell, 2009). The fact that participants in the study are my colleagues and managers is bound to have an impact on the manner in which information is conveyed during the interviews.

I currently work as an HR consultant in the financial institution where I conducted my research. The process for obtaining approval for my study was as follows. In order for my research to be conducted, permission was firstly obtained from the Unisa ethics committee. I was granted permission to proceed with my research study (Appendix A). Secondly, I obtained permission from the head of the human resources department by briefing him on what the research involved and how the process of interviews will take place in the HR department. The head of HR felt comfortable with me conducting my research within the HR department, and signed the document to give me permission to proceed (Appendix B). I assured the head of HR that the study will not be disruptive

as the interviews will be conducted in one of the financial institution's meeting rooms that is not linked to any department. Conducting the data collection in a neutral meeting room allows for the removal of disruptions and distractions that could take place if the interview was conducted within the HR department.

I set up meeting with the participants I wished to interview and explained the reasons for conducting my research with them specifically. I further informed them of what the interview would consist and that they are not forced in any way to participate in the study. All participants gladly accepted the invitation to do the interview and proceeded to sign the written consent form presented to them before the interview as permission to conduct the research. The gatekeeper (the head of the HR department) will be allowed to view the final dissertation in order to provide him insight as to why many engagement interventions fail and how to ensure successful engagement interventions are implemented within his department. The findings of the study will be reported as they are represented within the dissertation and be given to the head of the HR department as well as the participants involved in the study.

3.3.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was made use of in this study as it involved conducting research on participants who had a defining characteristic, and were useful for the data that I needed to obtain (Maree, 2010). The reason for this is that responses were obtained only from individuals who have experienced this phenomenon, or have been affected by this phenomenon: engagement interventions. Specifically, stratified purposive sampling was used, which involved selecting participants according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a specific research question (Maree, 2010). Factors such as homogeneity/heterogeneity, gender, age, race and demographics were kept in mind when conducting research on this sample (Maree, 2010). The criteria of the sample ensured that only HR practitioners were interviewed within this financial institution. In order for the researcher to obtain a sample with suitable characteristics as mentioned above, the following characteristics were established:

- The participants must be HR practitioners;
- The participants must be HR practitioners within this financial institution;
- The participants must at least have two years' experience in the HR field;
- The participants must understand and speak English; and
- The sample must include participants representing different denominations (African, coloured, white).

When determining the correct sample size, several factors had to be considered, such as the richness of the individual cases, the degree of commitment to the study's level of analysis and reporting, and the constraints the researcher is operating under (Smith, 2008). One general guideline that was noted by Creswell (2009) was that sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few individuals but also to collect extensive details or information about the participants in the study. Qualitative and exploratory research typically does not draw random samples or large samples (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Hence the sample for this research study consisted of five employees in the HR department of this financial institution. Data saturation was believed to be reached with these five practitioners, because the same information began to be repeated and reported upon (Monette, Sullivan, & De Jong, 2005). The sample demographics is summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1:

Sample demographics

	Profile	No.	%
Gender	Male	1	20%
	Female	4	80%
Race	African	3	60%
	Coloured	1	20%
	Indian	0	0%
	White	1	20%
Age	25-29	0	0%
	30-34	2	40%
	35-40	2	40%
	40-45	1	20%
Tenure in HR Roles	< 3 years	1	20%
	>3 years	4	80%

As shown in the table above, the majority of the sample consisted of females (80%) of whom 40% were African females (40%). The majority of the sample was between the ages of 30 and 40, with 80% of the participants having more than three years' experience in an HR role. But it should be noted that the intent of this study and of qualitative research in general is not to generalize the findings but rather to elucidate the particular and specific (Smith, 2008).

3.3.4 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to ensure participants could share their experience of engagement interventions. The semi-structured interviews were conversational rather than rigid and controlled. The reason for this is that semi-structured interviews allow for probing and clarification of answers (Maree, 2010). Prior to proceeding with the interview, participants have to give consent for the interview to be conducted. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a face-to-face interaction where I as interviewer asked the participants questions. All the interviews were conducted in English due to this being the preferred language of business communication. Open-ended questions were asked in order to allow the participant's views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes to be expressed pertaining to how they as HR practitioners experience engagement interventions (Maree, 2010).

The below interview guide (Table 3.2) was used. The interview guide consisted of six questions that are represented in the table below. The length of the interviews ranged between 20 and 60 minutes for participants to answer all six questions and permission was obtained to record the interviews before the commencement of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Table 3.2: Interview Guide

To explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within an financial institution	
To explore what the HR practitioner thinks engagement is.	
<u>Question 1:</u>	In your experience, what is engagement and what does engagement consist of?
To explore if the HR practitioner understands what an engagement intervention is.	
<u>Question 2:</u>	Have you heard of an intervention structured around engagement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think it is? • Can you give me an example of an engagement intervention?
To explore the HR practitioner's experience and perception of interventions structured around engagement.	
<u>Question 3:</u>	Do you believe interventions structured around engagement make a significant difference for the company or make a difference at all? Do you believe it's a positive or negative difference?
To understand what HR practitioners view their role as when it comes to implementing interventions structured around engagement.	
<u>Question 4:</u>	What do you think an HR practitioner's role is with regard to engagement and interventions structured around engagement?

To explore if the HR practitioner is aware of what current engagement interventions are successful in today's business world.	
<u>Question 5:</u>	In your opinion and experience, what do you believe is a successful engagement intervention?
To explore a real-life situation or a lived experience of an engagement intervention.	
<u>Question 6:</u>	Have you experienced a successful intervention structured around engagement or been part of the process of implementing one? Please elaborate.

Procedure

Pre-interview preparations

An initial meeting was set up with the five participants where I introduced the research study, provided context and answered any queries that the participants put forth. In this meeting the participants were asked if they were comfortable to proceed with the interviews; at this stage participants gave verbal consent. Thereafter an appointment was made for the interview to take place in an independent meeting room. The meeting room was neutral and separate from the HR department to ensure no disruptions took place during the interview. A neutral meeting room was used to ensure also that the participants felt at ease while answering questions during. Before the commencement of the interview participants were asked to sign a consent form to ensure they were happy to proceed with the interview. Participants were also taken through the participation form to ensure all questions were answered.

Conducting the interviews

Once consent was obtained, the interview commenced at the set meeting time. Before proceeding with the interview, permission was obtained from the participant to use a recorder during the interview. Two recorders were used, one being an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder (VN-711PC). An S4 Samsung Galaxy phone was used as a back-up. The interview commenced according to an interview guide (Table 1). In order to ensure that the participant felt at ease, the interview took place as a normal everyday conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In order to enable the researcher to make multiple observations of the participant during the interview, an observational protocol was used to ensure the recording of information while conducting the interview (Creswell, 2009). The observation protocol involved a margin being drawn down the side of the page with descriptive notes on elements such as the accounts of particular activities and physical setting. Reflexive notes were also made use of which reported on aspects

such as feelings, problems prejudices and impressions (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). Demographics also played a role as the time, place and setting of the interview were noted (Creswell, 2009). At the end of the interview the participants were thanked for their time. Additional to this, I made myself available should they have any further questions.

Post- interview feedback

Following the interview, an e-mail was sent to the participants thanking them for making their time available to participate in the interview. The findings will also be made available to the participants once the study is concluded, if they show an interest in viewing them.

3.3.5 Recording of data

As previously stated, two recording devices were made use of. Participants were informed of how the data was recorded, securely stored and processed (Terre-Blanche, 2004). The interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and by an external transcriber – to enhance the reliability and credibility of the data obtained. The written text, sound recording and observations made during the interview were used as the material for the analysis of meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.3.6 Data Analysis

Kafle (2011) emphasizes that there is no prescribed data analysis method to use when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research. In light of the latter, Tesch's (1990) framework for data analysis was used. Tesch's eight steps allow for a systematic process of analysing data (Creswell, 2009). The eight steps:

1. Firstly, the researcher has to make sense of the data and look at the data in a holistic manner. To do this the researcher should read all the transcriptions carefully and write down any ideas that may come to mind
2. Thereafter, the researcher needs to pick one interview, perhaps the shortest or most interesting interview, read through the context and ask the question 'What is this interview all about?' Think about its meaning; try not to think about the actual substance of the information. Write down ones thoughts in the margin.
3. Once the latter has been done, a list of all the topics in the interview should be made. Cluster the topics that are similar together. Arrange these topics into columns, perhaps cluster them according to major and minor topics and leftovers
4. Once you have this list you can return to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and indicate the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this organising to see if any new categories or codes emerge

5. Find the most descriptive wording that you can find for all topics and turn them into specific categories. Look at reducing your categories by grouping topics that relate to one another. You can even show interrelationships between categories
6. Make a final decision on what abbreviations you will give for each category and alphabetize these codes
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis
8. If you find it necessary or you wish to be more thorough, you can recode your data.

I coded the data myself and thereafter I sent the transcriptions to an external coder for coding. Once the external coder completed her coding, we compared themes to insure that similar themes were identified. The latter enhanced the validity and credibility of the data (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011).

3.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

3.3.7.1 Strategies employed to ensure quality data and ethical considerations

Strategies that will ensure quality data, and ethical considerations, are discussed below.

i) Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Two prominent qualitative researchers, Lincoln and Guba (1999), proposed the following four constructs to be included in a qualitative study, as they believe the assumptions reflect the paradigm more accurately than validity, reliability and objectivity (De Vos et al., 2011). In addition to this, crystallisation was proposed as an extra measure to better validity (Maree, 2010). The first of the criteria, credibility, is generally thought of as the most important (De Vos et al., 2011):

- *Credibility/ Authenticity.* In literature this is known as the alternative to internal validity, in which the aim is to demonstrate that the interview was done in such a way to ensure that the subject has been accurately described and identified (De Vos, et al, 2011). An independent transcriber was also made use of to minimise bias. An external coder was used to ensure that the themes identified were co-agreed upon. The report of the external coder can be seen in Appendix D. The latter allowed for enhanced credibility of the data collected. Further, to enhance credibility of the study a peer debriefer was used to enhance the accuracy of the account. My supervisor played this role.

- *Transferability.* This refers to the researcher asking whether the findings of the research can be transferred from one situation to another (De Vos et al, 2011). In this research study multiple sources of data were used such as interviews and reflexive notes. Rich and thick descriptions of my findings were used in order to transport the readers to the research setting and give my discussion an element of a shared experience (Creswell, 2009).
- *Dependability.* This refers to asking whether the research process is logical, audited and well documented (De Vos et al., 2011). Transcriptions, recordings and reflexive notes were all used to ensure the research process was well documented. Reflexive notes were made during the course of the interviews. An external transcriber and coder were used to ensure the research was an accurate account of the interviews and that the most relevant themes were identified. I coded the data as well, and themes were compared with the external coder to ensure that similar themes were being identified.
- *Conformability.* Conformability refers to asking whether the findings of this study can be confirmed by another study (Lincoln and Guba 1999). In order to ensure this, reflexive notes were made to ensure that if the study was to be repeated, similar conditions will be used. Bias was clarified through self-reflection when interpreting the findings by providing comments shaped around my background, history and socioeconomic origin and how this affected my research results obtained (Creswell, 2009).
- *Crystallisation.* Crystallisation is the practice of 'validating results by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis' (Maree, 2010, p. 40). To crystallise the data one would need to compare the study to similar studies in order to ensure validity. Peer debriefing will also be made use of; this involves making use of my supervisor (a peer debriefer) who will review and ask questions about my qualitative study. This will enhance the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2009).

ii) **Ethical Considerations**

In order to proceed with my research study I had to obtain ethical clearance from the University of South Africa (see Appendix A). The latter was done. Following this, I obtained permission from the head of HR to conduct research in the HR department in this financial institution.

Several ethical considerations were taken into account while conducting this research. Firstly, informed consent was sought. This was done through participants signing an informed consent form in order to ensure confidentiality is abided by (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004). While informed consent was obtained I was open to any questions the participant may have had.

Secondly, confidentiality was of high priority. Any limitations to confidentiality, such as sending the data to an external transcriber and coder, were made known to the participants before the interview was conducted. Raw data containing the individual's personal details was securely stored in a safe (secure combination lock) in a private residence (Terre-Blanche, 2004). Only the researcher, transcriber and coder had access to the data and data will only be disclosed if consent is obtained from the respondents. The data recordings were also backed up on an external hard drive

Thirdly, participants were free to withdraw from the research process at any time as the research was conducted on a voluntary basis (Creswell, 2013; Terre-Blanche, 2004). Fourthly, participants were informed that should they experience any physical, social or emotional harm they could contact the University of South Africa immediately (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004). Lastly, should the participants make use of the research analysis report, I believe it will help them as HR practitioners to identify the factors that contribute to a successful engagement intervention and factors that inhibit the successful implementation of an engagement intervention. As stated by Creswell (2009), both the researcher and the participant should benefit from the research done (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Terre-Blanche, 2004).

3.3.8 Reporting

The findings were reported by making use of the participant's verbatim words and converting these into themes and concepts. Verbatim quotes were used in order to substantiate the different themes and their relevant sub-themes. Further to this, literature references will be made use of.

3.4 FINDINGS

The aim of the findings is to discuss the themes and subthemes. Further, the findings were integrated with literature. These themes are discussed in detail below. The participants' own words will be used to provide context to what was found during the interviews. The numbers next to the statements indicate which participant made the statement, eg participant 1, participant 2, etc. Similarities and differences between the various participants' experiences will be discussed. The interaction between the various themes will also be elaborated upon.

Table 3.3

Table 3 below is a summary of the themes and the subthemes that were identified.

Themes	Sub-themes
1. HR practitioners' experiences of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological contract and communication • Staff motivation
2. HR practitioners' practical experiences of engagement interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement takes place on various levels • Engagement tools, which include discussions, interviews and surveys, etc
3. The significance of engagement interventions in a financial institution, as established by HR practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced interpersonal relationships and staff retention • HR neutrality • Staff involvement • Social engagement creates atmosphere for sharing
4. Engagement interventions are considered predominantly positive or successful by HR practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement interventions make a positive difference within the organisation • Successful engagement interventions alleviate anxiety • Win-win situation for all when co-created
5. HR practitioners as facilitators – the 'voice' and 'heartbeat' of engagement organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR practitioner's role • Engagement, intervention, execution • Creation, monitoring and accountability

3.4.1 HR Practitioners' experiences of engagement

The two most prevalent sub-themes that fall under the theme of HR practitioners' experiences of engagement are an employee's psychological contract and that engagement involves communication; and secondly that engagement means being motivated in their current role. Each of these themes will be discussed below.

3.4.1.1. Engagement involves communication and a psychological contract with the organisation

This specific theme gave an insight into participants' current knowledge of what engagement was as a concept. According to Kahn (1990), engagement entails the simultaneous employment and

expression of an employee's preferred self in task behaviours that promote personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), connection to work and others, and active performance roles. Two of the participants below understood engagement as communication, ie conversation (face to face, telephone and e-mail). This speaks to Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement where there is a connection between work and others.

"...it's having a conversation with the purpose of doing something and not just talking." (1)

"...for me 'engagement' is about constant communication and communication can be at all levels...face to face, telephone or e-mail engagement." (2)

Participants below (3, 4 and 5) understood engagement to be a psychological contract between employer and employee within the organisation. The psychological contract refers to the part of Kahn's (1990) definition where there is a connection to work and others as well as a commitment to active performance within their role at work.

"...an engagement is basically a process that combines both the employee and the employer in making sure that the employee wants to remain in this organisation one, and two is they are sort of connected with the organisation...if an employee feels that there is a good psychological contract between them and their employer then it creates an engagement." (3)

"...it's a very collaborative process...first of all for us to understand the requirements of the business...different ways that they want to engage...I think as an HR professional engagement is not just – your clients are your managers and employees, which is a very different type of engagement." (4)

Participant 5 speaks about being fully present, which is similar to what Kahn (1990) refers to in his definition of engagement: being personally present, be it physically, cognitively or emotionally.

"It is when employees are fully present in the workplace...giving fully of their time...of their skills...and in turn they are content with what the organisation is giving back to them. So it's that psychological contract between the employee and the employer." (5)

3.4.1.2. Engagement means being motivated in current role

Further to this, one participant felt that engagement specifically referred to when an employee would do more than is required of them. *"Engagement meaning that someone is properly engaged to do whatever that they need to do for the organisation and do it over and above the requirements of the organisation." (3)* Engagement was also described as being motivated in their current role within the

organisation: “... the employee is motivated enough to be in this organisation and the employee sees a positive employee value proposition for them to be in this organisation rather than to be in the next organisation. That’s what engagement for me is. So the results of engagement, number one it’s motivation, but the other one is full performance or exceptional performance that an employee has within this organisation.” Participant 3’s descriptions of engagement, where the participant referred to being motivated to do over and above the requirements of the organisation, is very much aligned to that of Naude and Rothmann’s (2006) description of engagement where they defined engagement as an energetic state in which an employee is committed to excellent performance at work and is confident in his or her effectiveness.

3.4.2 HR Practitioners’ practical experiences of engagement interventions

The two main sub-themes present under the theme ‘HR practitioners’ practical experiences of engagement interventions’ were that engagement interventions transpire on various levels and enhance staff motivation, and that engagement interventions consist of tools to assess engagement interventions such as surveys, interviews and discussions.

3.4.2.1 Interventions structured around engagement transpire on various levels and entail enhanced staff motivation and engagement (staff-centred)

French and Bell (1999) explained an intervention as a set of structured activities aiming at individual development and organisational improvement. Four of the five participants had an idea of what engagement interventions consisted of that was similar to that of French and Bell (1990). The participants referred to engagement interventions as bettering the organisation through employee engagement. One of the participants was unsure of what exactly an engagement intervention is: “No, I’ve never sorry, for the record [laughing]. So [pause] Okay you can correct me if I’m wrong, I don’t know if I understand fully, but if you are talking about intervention so for example HR needs to intervene in how things are being communicated to employees, where we feel the message is not coming across correctly”. (4)

Participants did say that interventions structured around engagement lead to enhanced motivation through understanding employee. According to one participant, by understanding their employees, employers can determine what factors make the employee happy or keep them engaged and then try to enhance these factors, which can lead to enhanced engagement:

“...you as an employer... understand what your employee is about in term so what their issues are, what their concerns are, what makes them happy...So how you would know they are happy is through having those engagements. So employee engagement is really making sure that you always understand your employee...” (1)

“So an intervention in terms of employee engagement means that there is probably the level of engagement is not where you want it to be. So you are trying to bring it up to a level where you expect it to be and where you want it to be.” (5)

Engagement interventions were also known by two participants to consist of various steps that were addressed on various levels in the financial institution. Participants referred to an engagement intervention's purpose as the assessment or measurement of the level of an employee's engagement within their role in the organisation. At a later stage the engagement intervention should provide steps to better their engagement.

“...an intervention that is structured around engagement in my mind is an intervention that makes sure that it measures, one, it measures first if employees are engaged, and two it comes up with actual steps to ensure that employees are engaged in the organisation if it finds them demotivated.” (3)

“...the interventions we had to take were obviously different workshops specifically the senior managers first and then with the managers and their teams...” (2)

3.4.2.2. Engagement interventions necessitate engagement tools such as surveys, discussions, interviews and implementation

Elements of an intervention include activities such as an event that has happened in the organisation and include interviews, questionnaires, methods and different activities (a single or an overall improvement plan), and collaboration between client and organisation (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997). Four of the participants stated specific tools that are normally used to measure engagement. These tools are identical to the activities that Quick et al. (1997) refer to when discussing elements of an intervention. One of the participants was not aware of specific tools or interventions used to measure engagement. Many examples of tools were mentioned, such as key performance indicators (KPI's), performance management, surveys (Employee Attitude Survey), focus groups, interviews, developmental plans, and lastly putting a remuneration philosophy in place. All of this is mentioned by the participants' responses below:

“...employee engagement tools would be normal things like performance, KPI discussions. So performance management, career management...makes sure that they can be able to perform optimally.” (1)

Then you get those um ad hoc interventions where through organisational development um studies like a survey or interviews you can be able to identify that in an organisation there is an issue...have those interventions where you start now in focus groups, to interview people to understand where the issues are lying and then how to improve it.” (1)

“...first of all what the population makeup is. So first of all what we wanted to understand from the survey was what is the age group...we looked at it in terms of age in the organisation...most importantly what they we retrying to get from the survey was to see what your interpretation of our culture is, how do we work, how transparent are we, what is our level of integrity...” (2)

“...employee satisfaction survey...once you get the answers from there you need to put action plans to ensure that employees are engaged... Another one will be to ensure that people have the right developmental plans for them to ensure that they are engaged as a result in improved performance, in the results they are motivated to stick around this organisation.” (3)

“...we just tried to ascertain what is it exactly around REM and benefits that is causing our staff to be disengaged and based on that we then put in place the REM Philosophy...So it has given us a structure, it has given us a philosophy that we all can understand and adhere to.” (5)

3.4.3 The significance of engagement interventions in a financial institution as established by HR practitioners

There were four main sub-themes present under the theme ‘Significance of engagement interventions in a financial institution as established by HR practitioners’. These four sub-themes consisted of the facilitation of enhanced personal relationships and staff retention; HR neutrality; staff involvement; and social engagement interventions create an atmosphere conducive to sharing.

3.4.3.1 Engagement interventions has significance as they facilitate enhanced interpersonal relationships and staff retention

An analysis done by Harter et al. (2002) of business-unit level relationships among engagement, employee satisfaction, and business results also found that engagement is linked directly to employee retention, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer sales and profitability. This was in line with one of the participant’s experiences of engagement interventions, as the participant noted that engagement interventions are significant and can lead to better retention of staff.

By understanding the antecedents or the factors that lead to engagement, organisations can work towards creating an environment that will nurture or enhance engagement in the workplace (Steger, Litman-Ovadia, Miller, Menger, & Rothmann, 2013). Three of the participants did note that in order to enhance engagement employers had to understand their employees and their concerns:

“...that’s the only way you can really as an employer be able to understand what the issues are in your company and without having any intervention how would you know?...to really get to the bottom of it you need to have an engagement with your staff members...” (1)

“Yes...in a company you know there are so many different variables that need to be considered when people come together okay, and I think as leaders in an organisation it is always important to understand when it is necessary to engage first and when is it necessary to create interventions for engagement.” (2)

“... once you understand what makes people tick then you put things in place to address those things then definitely people will be motivated.” (3)

3.4.3.2. Engagement interventions are significant due to HR neutrality

Most of the participants said that engagement interventions do make a significant difference.

“I do believe so. Um because um that’s the only way you can really as an employer be able to understand what the issues are...” (1)

“I think they make a significant um difference especially because if they are in response of what people are saying, “I’m not happy with” we should stop their engagement. Then if they are properly crafted they will assist in the retention of employees and they will also assist in showing that employees are performing to their best in this organisation.” (3)

“I do. So if – you see for engagement initiatives to make a significant different, significant difference um to a company one you need to understand the intervention that you are putting in place has got to be you need to understand what the actual problem is in order to come up with a specific intervention to address that issue for the problematic area.” (5)

“The reason that I think it makes a difference is because as HR professionals you are – we support the business...So I think it does make a difference and I think also when its’ coming from a neutral sort of party such as HR there is less bias in how it’s coming out because it’s seen as we are more of a mouthpiece of the business...” (4)

Participant 4 expressed his opinion that for an engagement intervention to make a difference, an HR practitioner should facilitate the engagement intervention as a neutral party to ensure that the engagement intervention does not disadvantage any of the parties in any way (employer or employee).

3.4.3.3. *Staff involvement creates significant engagement interventions*

One of the main conclusions of the review by Nielsen (2013) of organisational interventions was that both employees and line managers should actively play a role in determining the intervention process. Whether an organisational intervention succeeds in improving the condition it set out to improve (whether this be engagement or well-being) depends on this joint determination. This is similar to what was noted by one of the participants: that engagement interventions do make a significant difference as long as it is co-created along with staff members: *“...I strongly believe that it should be done co-jointly with staff because if someone highlights a problem they are the best person to give you the solutions to that problem...and then follow-through is very critical...”* (5). This was further established by Nielsen, Randall, Holten, and Gonzalez (2010), where it was suggested that organisational interventions involves problem solving, in which employees and line managers need to jointly work together to design an intervention process, identify risk factors, develop action plans to address the factors identified and implement and evaluate these actions. Ultimately for interventions to make a real contribution, both organisational and individual participation is required (Dewe & O' Driscoll, 2001; Le Fevre et al., 2006).

3.4.3.4. *Social engagement interventions creates an atmosphere conducive to sharing*

One of the participants noted that social engagements can allow for social interaction with any level of the business, for example, junior and senior employees can interact, which allows for easier interaction and engagements throughout the business. The critical point I believe the participant wished to bring to light was the fact that lower-level employees (junior) could engage with managers on higher levels and have easy access to them, which in turn allows for a more comfortable environment where employees are not scared to speak their views on what engagement interventions should be put in place to better engagement in the organisation. This will in turn enhance and better the implementation of the engagement intervention overall. This finding could not be found in current literature and therefore may represent a gap in knowledge that needs to be further explored.

“...when we have our social you know, that's a different type of intervention, but that's to bring the organisation together again to say 'let's celebrate what has happened this year'...I think that's also important when it comes to engagement because when you have got that type of non-hierarchal

structure where any staff member can engage or be part of interventions with any level of the organisation it also make it easy then for people to air their views.” (2)

3.4.4 Engagement interventions are considered predominantly positive or successful by HR practitioners

Three sub-themes were identified under the theme ‘Engagement interventions are considered predominantly positive and successful by HR practitioners’. These three sub-themes included engagement interventions: making a positive difference within the organisation, alleviating anxieties and creating a win-win situation for all when co-created.

3.4.4.1 Engagement interventions make a positive difference within the organisation

The majority (four out of five) of the participants experienced engagement interventions as making a positive difference. Participant 1 referred to knowing how their people feel and how they can improve upon this.

“It’s a positive difference; I think people like to be engaged, so people dislike it when you are an absent employer...as line managers and HR people we need to always constantly know what our people feel and how we can improve. I mean ultimately that would impact on the bottom line.” (1)

“It’s a positive difference...should you be able to deal with the matters of engagement then what you do is you are bringing positivity in this organisation because you are not wasting money on recruitment...you are keeping the performance high as a result of you know having engagement initiatives.” (3)

“I think it’s more of a positive difference...(4)

Participant 2 said that engagement interventions are positive, but continual engagement between key people in the business is needed to ensure engagement is taking place. *“I do think it is positive...through having constant and continuous engagement with key people in the business you can then pick up on when do I need to intervene.” (2)*

Participant 2 did experience engagement interventions to be positive, but warned that if it is not done regularly it can turn into a negative experience. *“I do think that we don’t do enough of it [interventions] and that’s why in that sense it can be negative.” (2)*. One of the participants experienced engagement interventions to be neutral due to engagement interventions not being implemented properly: *“I think it is a in neutral and the reason for that is because I do not think the interventions have been implemented properly...but foremost I don’t think we did a proper analysis*

of what the problem is exactly in order to come up with the intervention..." (5). The latter is good insight into why engagement interventions may not work, as both participants alluded to the fact that if the analysis and implementation of the intervention was not done properly, and if engagement interventions were not implemented regularly, it would result in the engagement intervention being ineffective.

3.4.4.2 *Successful engagement interventions alleviate anxieties*

Primary level interventions are concerned mainly with eliminating and modifying stressors in the workplace in order to adapt the environment to better suit or fit the individual (Kompier & Cooper, 1999). This is relevant to what participant one said, which was that successful engagement interventions can lead to reduced anxiety: *"...through interventions we were able to get to the bottom of the anxieties that were caused by the disruption in the business and being able to provide people with solutions where they were..."* (1). This was further established by Giga et al. (2003) in which he stated that interventions on an individual level aim at reducing stress (anxiety) and this provides employees with the skills to understand and cope with pressure and stress; however this is provided senior management take responsibility to ensure these interventions are executed in such a manner.

3.4.4.3 *Successful engagement interventions create a win-win situation for all involved when co-created*

In a study conducted by Nielsen, Abilgaard and Daniels (2014) it was found that when a tailored approach was followed when implementing interventions in an organisation it allowed for better ownership and commitment by these employees. This was mentioned by two of the participants, who were of the view that if engagement interventions are co-created it allows for a win-win situation, as employers and employees can agree on what they must focus on in terms of using interventions to address engagement: *"I think a successful engagement intervention means that I...there's a win-win as far as possible...I think a successful intervention doesn't necessarily mean that all the questions have been answered or that everybody is happy, but I think that it's where you have allowed for noise or unhappiness or uncertainty to be raised that we have taken note of that and that we have provided action steps and timelines in order to deliver on those things realistically."* (2) Another participant stated that: *"...the one thing that has been successful in terms of improving staff engagement was the co-creation of a X culture. I think that was run very successfully because once again it was co-created by every staff member within the organisation..."* (5). What I believe the participant is trying to allude to when referring to a win-win situation is that if the engagement intervention is created together, and both parties' opinions are considered and used, then both the

employer and employee will be more satisfied with the outcome or the implementation of the engagement intervention.

A recurring theme that came through from the participants was to have one-on-one discussions with their direct reports. This was a meeting that took place between employee and employer, and if needed, assistance was provided from HR. These meeting generally provided a gauge as to how engaged employees are in their current role: ...*“engagement helps to understand what noise is happening in the system and then intervening through either a big forum or one-on-one forums...”* (2); *“It is having a conversation, but more than just having a conversation, it’s too obviously it’s like a two way conversation where you listen to someone and with listening you get to understand what the person is saying more than just what they tell you, but also in terms of how they respond to what you are talking about.”* (1) *“...you on-board the right people, but make sure that you are giving them all the necessary tools that they need...ensure that their environment is the right environment for people....another initiative has to do with the development of people...then over and above that is people need to feel that they are progressing in the organisation...one-on-one discussions that each and every line manager through the assistance of HR needs to have with each and every employee...if the HR value chain is done properly then that guarantees engagement with the employee.”* (3). These one-on-one discussions can provide insight into how engaged and satisfied the employees are in their current role, and indicate what the employee thinks should be implemented in engagement interventions. This co-creation will help create buy-in when implementing the engagement interventions.

3.4.5 HR practitioners are considered to be the facilitators, the ‘voice’ and ‘heartbeat’ within engagement interventions

This is a very important theme that was identified, as HR practitioners see themselves playing an important role or link in the implementation of engagement interventions. Three sub-themes were identified under the theme ‘HR practitioners are considered to be facilitators, the “voice” and “heartbeat” within engagement interventions’. The first sub-theme looks specifically at the HR practitioner’s role; the second theme looks at the HR practitioner’s role in the facilitation and execution of engagement interventions; and lastly the role of a HR practitioner in the creation and monitoring of engagement interventions, as well as the accountability of HR practitioners in the implementation of engagement interventions.

3.4.5.1. HR Practitioner's role

HR practitioners did experience themselves as playing an important role in promoting engagement within organisations. Participants, who consisted only of HR practitioners, described themselves as 'facilitators' (1), 'middle man' (1), 'business partners' (2), 'pulse' (3), and the 'heartbeat' (3) when implementing engagement interventions within the organisation. Two of the participants noted that HR practitioners often bridge the gap between providing insight into employers and employees' needs and concerns and addressing these needs, which helps better engagement within the organisation:

"I think it's a facilitator role, so I would say the middle man, so someone that makes sure that from an employer's perspective there is that understanding of where the issues are so that you can improve the climate of the organisation...and from an employee's side it's also to make sure that the employer understands what your needs are as an employee so that you can be effective in your job." (1)

"...we have moved away from being just administrators... because we are now partners with business they almost see us at the forefront of engagements and interventions...as an HR practitioner it is then my responsibility to make sure that I have engaged with the head of the area to say: 'Look these are the trends that I'm picking up from your team, as an HR practitioner I am advising that we intervene by having a workshop...'...engagement helps to understand what noise is happening in the system and then intervening through either a big forum or one-on-one forums..." (2)

Strong words were often used to describe an HR practitioner's role in implementing engagement interventions, such as HR being the 'pulse' and the 'heartbeat' of the organisation and therefore able to equip the business with tools and solutions to better engagement: *"...HR is the pulse of the organisation. So an HR person is one who has to know exactly what is happening with each and every employee in the company...an HR practitioner is here number one to be the pulse, but also to provide tools and solutions in line to ensure that each and every person is engaged...an HR practitioner's role is to ensure that there is as little turnover as possible in the organisation and then the business is equipped to perform at the highest levels as well as that the business is not wasting money." So the HR professional's role is to be the heartbeat of the organisation where they know what's happening and they provide solutions to assist line in making sure that each and every employee is engaged and is motivated. (3).*

3.4.5.2 HR Practitioners facilitate and execute engagement interventions

HR practitioners be at the forefront of encouraging communication within their organisation and promoting engagement within organisations (Wollard, 2011). The latter is similar to the experiences of three of the participants in their role as HR practitioner; these participants experienced themselves to be at the 'core' of implementing engagement interventions where they personally facilitated the whole process: *"...by identifying those issues you use different types of engagements with staff members, with line managers and the executives. So my role has always been the core one on engagement...facilitating the whole process and bringing everyone together towards a common goal."* (1); *"I think we should be there to – well I would hope that before these interventions happen we have actually sat down with the person that is actually driving it and communicating it um so that we can guide them in the right direction or be sort of facilitators. So I think we should definitely be there to support, um help manage, answer questions, but I don't think we should be the drivers necessarily."* (4); *"It is then I believe an HR practitioner's role to facilitate the creation of the interventions."*(5)

3.4.5.3 HR Practitioners create, monitor and are accountable for engagement interventions

The participants explained that they were involved in the implementation of engagement interventions from the very beginning to the end; in essence they facilitated the whole process. The participants explained their specific role or multiple roles in engagement interventions, which included: being involved in the creation of engagement interventions, participation in focus groups, building and brainstorming engagement interventions; and lastly executing and monitoring the intervention:

"So as an intervention...they then developed an issue resolution system...so the staff member has made us aware that there is an issue, it is then up to us to take that issue to the line manager or to the staff member directly depending on the confidentiality around it." (2)

"I have actually played quite a number of roles, starting at a point where I was very junior...being in HR you get involved in things end-to-end...So involved in the brainstorming up to a point where I will be facilitating those events or those initiatives and up to a point where I will be monitoring the progress of those things as part of the project team...[now] I have to sit and put together a strategy on building those initiatives...as well as being accountable for the delivery of those initiatives." (3)

"...as a team we had to get together to communicate what message was going to go out ... My role was then to ensure that it got executed – the intervention. So that I set up all the meetings, make sure that all the necessary people were there and did an impact analysis...So I actually had to execute the intervention..." (4)

“I scheduled the focus groups, partook in some of the focus groups and did some of the interviews in the focus groups you know, as part of the task team...” (5)

The findings of this study have been incorporated into a diagrammatic representation, Figure 1, below.

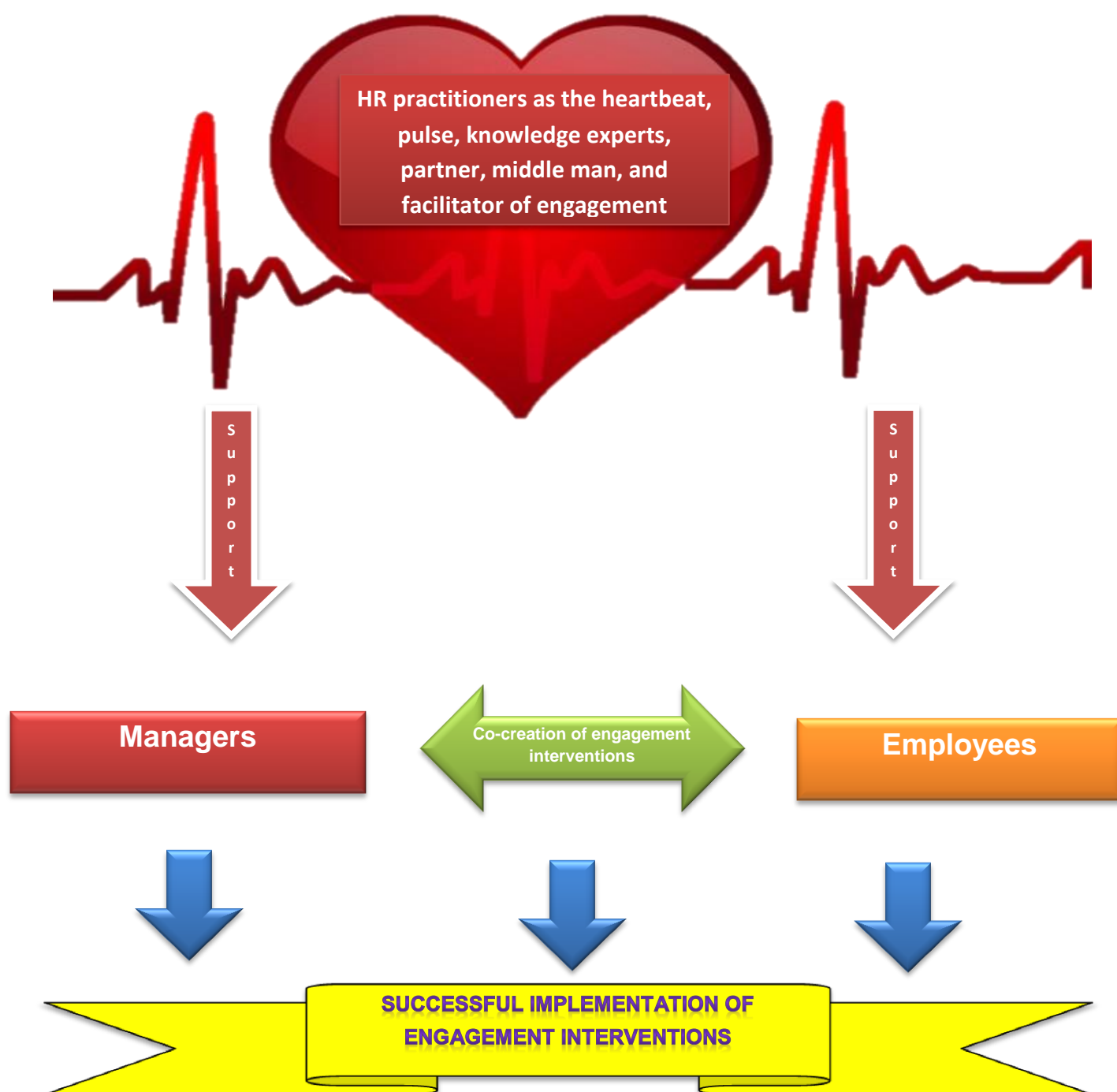


Figure 3.1: Diagrammatic representation of findings

Having articulated the findings of this study and presented a diagrammatic representation of the findings, a discussion with further integration of the HR practitioners' experiences with the literature, will follow.

3.5 DISCUSSION

3.5.1. Main objective of this study

The main objective of this research was to explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution. The research will help provide an insight into HR practitioner's understanding of engagement and engagement interventions, and will possibly provide further knowledge of why some engagement interventions fail and others succeed.

3.5.2. Main Contributions of this study

The study revealed a number of key findings, which included that HR practitioners in this study generally understood and have experienced what engagement is and what an engagement intervention consists of. The HR practitioners in this study were aware of the tools used to assess engagement in the organisation. The latter was consistent with the literature. Participants noted that engagement interventions can result in better retention of staff and overall performance of the company. Engagement interventions took place on various levels in this financial institution, and were experienced as predominantly significant by the participants. But it was noted that engagement interventions are only significant if they involve a process of employer and employee working together to address engagement. This allows for greater ownership and accountability and better ensures the success of the intervention. Engagement interventions were considered to be predominantly positive and successful by most of the participants. However, participants noted that if there is no follow-through on the implementation of the engagement intervention, it can become negative. Some participants had limited knowledge of engagement interventions, which is very concerning as they are the drivers and facilitators of engagement interventions as HR practitioners; and limited knowledge can result in engagement interventions failing. The participants experienced themselves as playing an important role in implementing engagement interventions in this financial institution. They often referred to themselves as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions. Ultimately, HR practitioners were generally involved in engagement interventions from beginning to end and were part of the team that made sure implementation took place.

3.5.3. Integration of findings with literature

On the concept of engagement alone the majority of participants experienced engagement as a psychological contract; it was described as 'motivation to remain within the organisation' as well as motivation to remain in their current role. This is consistent with Richman's (2006) definition of engagement, where he was of the view that engaged employees are energized, committed and work hard to help the company succeed. Further, employees who are cognitively engaged believe they make a contribution to the organisation (Shuck & Reio, 2011). One participant noted that being engaged would lead to enhanced performance, which was prevalent in Richman's study (2006) where he found engaged employees to use their energy, skills, creativity and experience to deliver results and satisfy customers. The motivation to engage concerns the communication of the jobs specific responsibilities and the degree of challenging work the job provides to the employee (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009).

However, two of the participants understood engagement to be more related to communication, ie one-on one conversation between employer and employee. Although communication does form part of engagement (communication was listed as one of the commitment drivers of high engagement by Richman (2006), it is only one element of engagement. This shows a limited knowledge or view of what engagement is all about. Communication can be a broad-level engagement intervention, as it encourages managers to hold one-on-one meetings that are driven by the employee and not the manager, enhancing communication to be more open and transparent, knowledge sharing and group collaboration, and the creation of processes and procedures that encourage projects and team assignments (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

The fact that two of the participants have limited knowledge of engagement as a practice is concerning, as it is imperative that HR practitioners understand the nature of engagement and its possible antecedents and outcomes (Shuck & Reio, 2011). This was also found in literature, as Macey and Schneider (2008) reported that in many cases engagement measures have failed to get the conceptualisation of engagement correct, therefore measurements of engagement are incorrectly done. In the world of practice there have been measures of what we have called conditions of engagement labelled as measures of engagement, and many measures that for years have been indicators of employee opinions have been relabelled as indicants of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This finding may provide further insight into why engagement interventions are not successful in some instances.

Further to this, HR practitioners are deemed by their organisations as knowledge experts (Wollard, 2011) with regard to engagement and implementation of engagement interventions, so a finding

such as this is of great concern. This lack of knowledge could be attributed to various causes. One of them could be that because the participant is younger than the other participants in the sample, the participant may have not been exposed to many engagement interventions in the HR field which could result in difficulty describing what an engagement intervention is or how the participant experienced this specific intervention. Education could also play a significant role in one's knowledge of engagement interventions. The reason for the latter statement is that the participant who was not really informed as to what an engagement intervention consisted of is pursuing a BCom in human resources management, whereas the rest of the participants completed their degrees several years ago.

Engagement interventions were experienced by the participants to take place on various levels within this financial institution. HR practitioners should be the leaders in creating a more engaged workforce through the implementation of engagement interventions on various levels (Wollard, 2011). This is consistent with what Harter et al. (2002) found, that HR leaders and practitioners should be able to identify factors that lead to engagement and must be able to promote and maintain these factors both at a group and individual level. Interventions are usually structured at three levels, namely individual, individual/organisational and organisational level (Giga et al., 2003). Individual interventions aim at reducing stress; individual/organisational level concentrates on issues related to the interface between individual and their work and to ensure individuals are able to deliver on their work expectations; and lastly organisational level interventions concentrate on issues such as organisation-wide policies and procedures that prevent employee stress (Giga et al., 2003).

Not only are the engagement interventions at an organisational and individual level, but engagement intervention strategies can also be on three different levels (primary, secondary and tertiary levels), according to Kompier and Cooper (1990). These three levels deal with work engagement, work-related well-being, and stress and burnout. Primary level interventions deal mainly with eliminating and modifying stressors in the workplace in order to better fit or suit the individual. The latter is consistent with one participant's views of engagement interventions. The participant said that the intervention must first measure the overall engagement of the organisation, and then at a later stage propose ways to better engagement.

Further, four participants noted that engagement surveys, discussions, interviews were the tools used to assess engagement and that these tools are necessary to establish the level of engagement within the organisation and in effect will determine what engagement interventions are needed. This is consistent with literature, as elements of an engagement interventions can include activities such as an event that has occurred in the organisation and can include interviews, methods, questionnaires and different activities (a single or overall improvement plan), and

collaboration between organisation and employee (Quick et al., 1997). Jorgensen (2006) also stated that an intervention may consist of many activities, such as interviews and questionnaires with different levels of activities, i.e. a single task or a plan to improve the organisation overall.

Within this financial institution, engagement interventions were considered by the participants to include engagement surveys such as the Employee Attitude Survey (EAS) which gives and insight into how engaged the employees are in their current role in the organisation. According to Burke (2005) the purpose of an intervention is to evaluate or generate knowledge. An EAS survey is an example of this, as it provides insight into what elements of engagement should be addressed via an engagement intervention on an organisational level. One participant noted that engagement interventions included workshops to assess what engagement interventions were necessary to address the concerns that were hindering higher levels of engagement within this financial institution. This is consistent with literature, because in order to develop a measurable, observable and explicit objective as part of an action plan, it is imperative that diagnostic activities precede interventions in organisations (such as an EAS survey conducted by this financial institution) (Jorgensen, 2006). By obtaining an analysis of both the positive and negative aspects of the organisation, multiple interventions can be derived and will help ensure an organisation-wide change is successful (Jorgensen, 2006). The latter was consistent with the majority of participants' views of engagement interventions.

Further to this, four of the participants referred to engagement interventions as developmental plans, Employee Attitude Survey (EAS), key performance indicators (KPI's), remuneration philosophy and career management. This was similar to what Kompier and Cooper found (1999): primary level interventions include career development, which gives employees opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills (Roberts & Davenport, 2002). Primary level interventions also include performance management. Additional to this, Rothman and Rothman (2010) concluded that various aspects of engagement should be addressed in organisations today in order to enhance engagement, such as remuneration and advancement opportunities such as training and promotion. Rewards management is said to have a major impact on an employee's perception of the employment relationship (Aggarwal, Datta, & Bhargava, 2007). In today's economic conditions, reward management can lead to increased engagement and better retention of staff (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Performance management was listed as an engagement intervention by one participant. It is important that managers take accountability when it comes to promoting and developing employee engagement by linking performance appraisals to data-driven metrics systems (KPI's in this financial institution) that include equally weighted measures of the organisation's performance and culture (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Engagement interventions were considered by the participants to be predominantly significant in this financial institution. One participant said that engagement interventions can result in better retention of staff. Retention, which is another function of HR practitioners, has recently become a critical priority for business (Aggarwal et al., 2007). Additional to this, one participant stated that engagement interventions could lead to employees performing to the best of their abilities. It was further established that HR interventions are significant, as they are driven by a neutral party, being HR practitioners. But HR practitioners cannot better engagement alone. Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby (2013) found that positive experiences of HR management practices alone are insufficient to generate a high level of engagement and performance. But a combination of positive perceived line manager behaviour and positive experiences of HR practices can lead to a more engaged and higher-performing workforce.

One participant experienced that engagement interventions are only significant if they involve a process of employer and employee working together to address engagement: in other words, if engagement interventions are 'co-jointly created'. This was also found in literature, as employees should be asked for their inputs into bettering the current organisational practices and procedures (Jorgensen, 2006). Interventions should be tailored to address employee's needs and desires. However the support of top management is essential when promoting organisation well-being (Jorgensen, 2006). Further to this, Nielsen (2013) was of the view that when it came to organisational interventions, both employees and line managers should actively play a role in determining the intervention process. Whether an organisational intervention succeeds in improving the condition it set out to improve (whether this be engagement or well-being) depends on this joint determination. Nielsen et al., (2010) suggested that organisational interventions involves a level of problem solving that requires employees and line managers to jointly work together to design an intervention process, identify risk factors and develop action plans. This was further established by Dewe & O' Driscoll, (2001) and Le Fevre et al., (2006) who determined that for interventions to make a real contribution, both organisational and individual participation is required.

Engagement interventions were considered to be predominantly positive and successful by most of the participants. However, it was noted by participants that if there is no follow-through on engagement interventions, or if HR practitioners do not continually address engagement through interventions, it can become negative. This was also suggested by Giga et al. (2003) and Shuck and Rose (2013). Proper implementation and follow-through of engagement interventions is a key determinant in an engagement intervention being experienced as positive. Interventions with an individual-focused approach often fail due to senior management's failure to take the necessary responsibility when implementing engagement interventions (Giga et al., 2003). It is important that the organisation is ready to be part of an engagement intervention and that the necessary internal

and external resources are available to implement the engagement intervention (Jorgensen, 2006).

Further to the earlier point of co-creation, participants eluded to the fact that an engagement intervention was successful when there was a win-win situation for both employer and employee. The participant experienced that, in order to create a win-win situation, engagement interventions should be co-created, meaning the creation of the intervention should be done together, where both parties provide input and ultimately are happy with the intervention implementation as both parties will take ownership and accountability to ensure the success of the intervention. This was the conclusion drawn from a study by Nielsen, Abilgaard and Daniels (2014), where a tailored approach was followed when implementing interventions within an organisation and this allowed for better ownership and commitment by these employees.

One of the participants did refer to the point that social engagement allows for social interaction with any level of business (junior or senior), which ultimately resulted in easier communication channels between employer and employee on the success of engagement interventions, however this finding could not be substantiated in literature and has therefore revealed a gap in literature.

The participants experienced themselves in the role of HR practitioner to play an important role in implementing engagement interventions within this financial institution. They often referred to themselves as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions. In light of the latter, Wollard (2011) stated that HR practitioners must become advocates and give employees opportunities to voice their opinions on any aspects that erode employee well-being within the organisation. HR practitioners should be at the forefront of developing and encouraging communication within organisations and must be able to recognise when engagement levels are low (Wollard, 2011). Strategic HR practitioners should focus on evaluating the linkage between HR developmental systems, policies and procedures, and organisational strategies, and should take into account the perspectives of all stakeholders (Garavan, 2007). Although there is mention of HR practitioners being at the forefront of communication and leaders in their organisations as mentioned above, there is limited literature on linking HR practitioners as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions.

Two of the participants experienced themselves as often bridging the gap between employer and employee by helping employers understand what concerns or issues should be addressed via engagement interventions. This was also suggested by Wollard (2011), who indicated that HR practitioners should be the leaders in creating more engaged workforce, and therefore should take accountability in bridging the gap between employer and employee.

Some of the roles HR practitioners took on included participating or organising focus groups, and the facilitation thereof. Additional to this, HR practitioners participated in brainstorming sessions that helped identify engagement interventions to address concerns related to engagement. A main theme that came from the interviews was that HR practitioners were generally involved in engagement interventions from beginning to end, and were part of the team that made sure implementation took place.

A research hypothesis that may be suggested for future research purposes would be that: HR practitioners play the role of the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions. Further research on the latter may provide insight into whether HR practitioners experience themselves to be central to enhancing engagement through engagement interventions in organisations today.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this unstable, uncertain environment, perhaps more than at any other time in history, engaging employees has become a strategic imperative, an imperative that will result in competitive advantage for organisations that take the opportunity to develop passionately committed employees; and not committed because they are paid well, but because they personally choose to be committed (Shuck et al., 2010). As for organisations seeking the development of an engaged workforce, HR practitioners will be at the forefront of both the practical and scholarly knowledge emerging around engagement (Shuck et al., 2010).

From the findings of this study one can establish that HR practitioners have a critical role to play in enhancing engagement through interventions. But their knowledge needs to be informed by current literature on engagement and engagement interventions in order to ensure that when implementing these engagement interventions, they will achieve the desired organisational results. This research can contribute to bettering engagement interventions within organisations today, and ensuring the interventions implemented in organisations are effectively implemented and do contribute to bettering engagement.

3.7 LIMITATIONS

The researcher focused on a single financial institution, which is only one organisation in one industry. Further to this, the research took place in a South African context only. The small size of the sample may mean limited insight was obtained. However, the findings were in line with literature.

As the study was qualitative in nature, the findings cannot be generalised across different contexts. The researcher was also an employee at the organisation and was used as the tool to conduct the research, which can be limiting. The latter may have had an effect on the information obtained from the interviews, as participants may have wanted to represent their knowledge in a more positive light than they would have done in the case of a neutral researcher. However, this risk was mitigated by outlining what the researcher's role was and what the purpose of the interview was.

Further to this, limited research has been done on the HR practitioner's role specifically in implementing engagement interventions, which meant it was difficult to compare different studies against each other.

3.8 PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has given the necessary insight into how HR practitioners understand and have experienced engagement and engagement interventions and their specific role in the implementation of these engagement interventions. As many I/O psychologists today may act in an HR practitioner role in their day to day activities, and as they are seen as leaders within their organisations (Barnard & Fourie, 2007) and primary role models for change, hope and happiness within their organisations (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), it is important that they too understand and have insight into what makes an engagement intervention successful and what factors can lead to the success of an engagement intervention.

HR practitioners and I/O psychologists need to be aware of what engagement interventions can address engagement concerns within a company or what engagement interventions will make a significant positive difference within a company. What I recommend based on this research is that when creating or facilitating engagement interventions, the process must involve both employer and employee working together to address engagement. This will allow for greater ownership and accountability and will better ensure the success of the intervention, provided continual attention is put on bettering engagement through interventions. What is recommended is that HR practitioners and I/O psychologist always ensure they are continually aware of what engagement interventions are successful according to literature, and that they always keep themselves updated in the field of engagement as it is a constant changing field of study. HR practitioners need to remain the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it comes to implementing engagement interventions. To do this they need to ensure that they are knowledge experts in the field of

engagement and engagement interventions.

3.9 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As a result of the sample being quite small, consideration should be given to conducting a similar study of a bigger sample across numerous industries. There is very limited literature on HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions on a South African and international level which means there was a gap in knowledge when comparing this study's finding to those of similar studies; therefore I would suggest performing further qualitative and quantitative studies to address this gap.

Additional to this, I would suggest doing further research on the role HR practitioners play as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions. Further research on the latter may provide insight into whether HR practitioners experience themselves to be central to enhancing engagement through engagement interventions in organisations today. There was also a gap identified in that it was found that social engagement interventions creates an atmosphere conducive to sharing, however supporting literature could not be found. Perhaps this should be explored further.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the empirical approach, the relevant literature points and the study were discussed. The findings were represented in an explorative qualitative analysis which provided a conclusion, along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study are formulated. The conclusions of the research finding of both the literature review and the interpretive study are evaluated against the research's aim as stated in Chapter 1. The aim of the study was to explore HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution. In the literature review, engagement as a concept, engagement interventions and the HR practitioner's role in implementing engagement interventions were explored. In the interpretive study a qualitative exploratory approach was followed and this approach allowed for greater insight into what HR practitioners 'experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution were. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions regarding the literature review as well the hermeneutic phenomenological study are discussed below.

4.2.1 Conclusions regarding the literature review

The literature review was designed to answer the following questions: 1) What is engagement? 2) What are engagement interventions? 3) Lastly, what are human resources practitioners' roles when it comes to engagement and engagement interventions? This is discussed in more detail below.

4.2.1.1. Engagement

The literature review established that engagement is a critical element in today's working world. It can lead to increased productivity, retention, and reduced turnover (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). However, it has been reported in research that engagement is on the decline and there is a decrease in engagement among employees today (Richman, 2006). This could be explained by the fact that many engagement interventions in organisations are failing (Jorgensen, 2006).

According to Kahn (1990), engagement is simultaneous employment and expression of an employee's preferred self in task behaviours that promote personal presence (physical, cognitive

and emotional), connection to work and others, and active performance roles. In a South African context, Naude and Rothmann (2006) stated that engagement is an energetic state in which an employee is committed to excellent performance at work and is confident in his or her effectiveness.

Further, a definition that is widely used in the HR community is provided by Shuck and Wollard (2010), who define engagement as 'an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (sic) state directed toward desired organizational outcomes' (p.103). This definition was built on the seminal definitions of employee engagement by Kahn (1990), Macey and Schneider (2008) and Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, (2001).

Further to this definition, based on the perspectives of Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) it can be concluded that engagement consists of three dimensions: firstly, a physical element which refers to being physically involved in a task and showing a positive affective state and vigour when completing that task; secondly, a cognitive component which involves an experience of feeling involved and absorbed by an activity, and being alert at work; and lastly, an emotional component which is when an employee is connected to their job while working and shows commitment and dedication to their job (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). In summary, engagement is operationally defined as a series of psychological states, being emotional, cognitive and behavioural which ultimately represent the intention of incorporating motivation-like qualities (Shuck & Reio, 2013).

4.2.1.2. Engagement and interventions structured around engagement

The literature review established that an intervention is considered to be a structured set of activities that have a primary purpose of bettering individual development and organisational improvement (French and Bell, 1999). An intervention can also be thought of as planned, theory-based, behavioural action that aims to better employee well-being and health through the way work is designed, managed and organised (Giga et al., 2003a; La Montagne et al., 2007; & Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Interventions are known to include activities such as interviews, questionnaires, methods and collaboration amongst employee and employer (Quick et al., 1997).

Through the literature review it was established that there are three levels of intervention strategies that deal with aspects such as work related well-being, work engagement, burnout and stress. These three levels are thought of as primary, secondary and tertiary strategies (Kompier and Cooper, 1999). It was established that primary level interventions refer mainly to eliminating and modifying stressors in the workplace in order to better suit or fit the individual. A secondary intervention focus more on the individual, and is concerned with increasing the awareness and extending the physical and psychological resources of employees to enable them to decrease the

damaging effects of stress and to handle stress in a more effective way, which in turn enhances engagement. Lastly, tertiary level interventions referred to the individual, and focused specifically on their role as being recuperative rather than preventative.

An interesting finding in literature was that of Jorgensen (2006), where interventions were implemented to address the levels of engagement and burnout of SAPS (South African Police Service) members. The study revealed that pre- and post-measurement showed no significant difference in work-related well-being and engagement of the SAPS members. The latter pointed to the fact that the intervention failed, which provides further evidence that it is important to determine what HR practitioners' experiences of engagement are, as they are responsible for implementation of engagement strategies and interventions in many cases (Shuck & Reio, 2011). An important finding from Jorgensen's research was that organisations should be ready to be part of the intervention and that the necessary internal and external resources should be available (Jorgensen, 2006). Secondly, valid information should be readily available, and lastly, there needs to be a high degree of ownership by the all staff in the organisation to ensure that the interventions are effective (Jorgensen, 2006).

A study conducted by Rothman and Rothman (2010) concluded that various elements should be in place to foster an environment that promotes engagement. Firstly, interventions should be structured to ensure work-role fit of employees, as well as provide variety, autonomy and learning opportunities within their jobs; this ultimately contributes to experiences of engagement and psychological meaningfulness. Secondly, interventions should be implemented to accomplish specific objectives, such as providing role clarity, fostering good relationships with supervisors, ensuring organisational support, enhancing role clarity, bettering communication and participation in decision-making. Thirdly, advancement opportunities such as training, promotion and remuneration should be a priority in the organisations talent strategy (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

In concluding engagement and interventions, the main themes were that there is an expectation that the purpose of an intervention or intervention process should generally be to better individual development and organisational improvement (French and Bell, 1999). Interventions were shown to take place on three levels, primary, secondary and tertiary strategies, with the ultimate aim of enhancing engagement and well-being and decreasing burnout and stress (Kompier and Cooper, 1999). There was evidence presented as to why engagement interventions may not succeed. But factors were discussed that can be incorporated to ensure the success of an intervention (Rothman and Rothman, 2010). Ultimately, it is of great importance that HR practitioners communicate the purpose of the intervention in a way that creates meaning for employees in order to reach the ultimate goal of bettering engagement within the workplace, as HR practitioners along with line

managers are responsible for the successful implementation of the intervention (Shuck & Reio, 2011; Shuck & Rose, 2013).

4.2.1.3. Engagement and HR Practitioners

The literature review established an alarming theme in that it was found that many employees doubt the leader's knowledge about how to develop engagement within the organisation (Czarnowsky, 2008). HR practitioners will need to change this dynamic, employees need to believe that their leaders, also known as HR leaders, know how to develop engagement within the organisation, and HRD practitioners should be in possession of data that can demonstrate whether or not the development has occurred (Wollard, 2011). HR practitioners need to be at the forefront of encouraging communication within their organisation and promoting engagement within organisations. (Wollard, 2011). As HR practitioners are leaders of change in organisations, HRD leadership must be aware of the different building blocks of organisations and be able recognise signs of employee burnout and organisational change cynicism (Wollard, 2011).

However, one of the prevalent themes identified was the fact that HR practitioners cannot better engagement alone; they need the combination of positive perceived line manager behaviours together with the positive experiences of HR management practices in order to generate a high level of engagement and performance (Alfes et al., 2013). Only this collaboration between both parties, employer and employees, will allow for the effective implementation of HR interventions, which in turn will lead to employees perceiving engagement interventions in a much more positive light and this will ultimately lead to better engagement within the organisation (Alfes et al., 2013).

Through the literature review, possible individual antecedents and organisational antecedents (Richman, 2006) were highlighted that could lead to increased engagement within an organisation, provided the engagement interventions were implemented in an effective manner. The different levels of engagement interventions (Kompier and Cooper, 1999) were discussed, as well as the HR practitioner's role (Wollard, 2011) in implementing these engagement interventions. Ultimately, the literature review provided the necessary insight into engagement interventions that can assist in answering the research question of 'What are HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution?'

4.2.2 Conclusions regarding the hermeneutic phenomenological study

The study revealed a number of key findings, which included the fact that generally HR practitioners in this study understood and have experienced what engagement and engagement interventions

consist of. The majority of the HR practitioners in this study were aware of the tools (engagement surveys, discussions, interviews) used to assess engagement and understood their role in the implementation and facilitation of engagement interventions. Engagement interventions were considered by the participants to include engagement surveys such as the Employee Attitude survey (EAS) which gives insight into how engaged the employees are in this financial institution. This is consistent with literature, because in order to develop a measurable, observable and explicit objective as part of an action plan, it is imperative that diagnostic activities precede interventions in organisations (such as an EAS survey conducted by this financial institution) through risk assessments (Jorgensen, 2006).

Participants referred to engagement interventions such as developmental plans, Employee Attitude Survey (EAS), Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), remuneration philosophy and career management. This is consistent with what Kompier and Cooper (1999) found, in that primary level interventions should include career development, which provides employees with opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills (Roberts & Davenport, 2002). Participants stated that the outcome of engagement interventions can result in better staff retention. Interventions aim to change some aspects of the organisation, be it the structure, climate or to improve the overall functioning and health of the organisation (Jorgensen, 2006). It was noted that some participants had limited knowledge on engagement interventions and the tools used to assess engagement, ie some participants thought of engagement as including communication only, which is very concerning as they are the drivers and facilitators of engagement interventions and limited knowledge can result in engagement interventions not being successful. As stated in Chapter 3, there could be numerous reasons for the lack of knowledge; education and age I believe played a big role in how informed and knowledgeable the participants were with regard to the conceptualisation of engagement and implementation of engagement interventions. As stated by Macey and Schneider (2008), if one does not know what one is measuring, the action implications will be at best vague, and at worst a leap of faith. Unfortunately there is a gap in research, especially on HR practitioners' and employees' experiences of engagement (Gebauer & Lowman, 2008), which makes it difficult to compare such finding to similar studies. A point that must be noted is that HR practitioners are deemed by their organisations as knowledge experts (Wollard, 2011) with regard to engagement and implementation of engagement interventions, so a finding such as this is of great concern, and I believe more research is needed.

Engagement interventions took place on various levels within this financial institution and were experienced to be predominantly significant by the participants. A participant did allude to the fact that social engagements allow for social interaction with the various levels of management (junior to senior) which in turn resulted in easier communication channels between employer and employee.

This allowed for better communication between both parties as to whether an engagement intervention was successful or not, however this finding could not be substantiated in literature and has therefore indicates a gap in literature. Further observations and findings included the fact that engagement interventions should be collaborative between employer and employee, with the support of top management to ensure the success of the engagement intervention (Giga et al., 2003a). This will allow for greater ownership and accountability and will better ensure the success of the intervention. Interventions should be tailored to employees' needs and desires; however the support of top management is essential when promoting organisational well-being (Jorgensen, 2006).

Engagement interventions were considered to be predominantly positive and successful by most of the participants. However it was noted by participants that if there is no follow-through on the implementation of the engagement interventions, it can become negative. Proper implementation and follow-through of engagement interventions is a key determinant in an engagement intervention being experienced as positive. Interventions with an individual-focused approach often fail due to senior management's failure to take the necessary responsibility when implementing engagement interventions (Giga et al., 2003a). It is important that the organisation is ready to be part of an engagement intervention, and that the necessary internal and external resources are available to implement the engagement intervention (Jorgensen, 2006). The two key determinants of follow-through on engagement interventions and the support of senior management will be a significant deciding factor as to whether an engagement intervention will be successful or not. This is significant as the HR practitioner will play a key role in the implementation of engagement interventions and gaining the support of senior management; in fact many of the HR practitioners in this study alluded to the fact that they will be involved in the engagement process from beginning to end. This aligns with what Wollard (2011) stated, HR practitioners need to be at the forefront of encouraging communication within their organisation and promoting engagement within organisations, as well as leaders of change in organisations. The latter speaks to the fact that HR practitioners experienced themselves to play an important role in implementing engagement interventions within this financial institution. The participants often referred to themselves as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' when it came to implementing engagement interventions.

There is very limited literature on HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions on a South African and international level, which means there was a gap when comparing this study's findings to those of similar studies.

In summary, the study provides the insight that engagement interventions today may be

implemented by HR practitioners who are not necessarily equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to advise and guide an organisation in the implementation of successful engagement interventions. Due to the organisations viewing interventions in many cases in a positive light and of significant importance to the success of the organisation, it is imperative that HR practitioners are well informed and knowledgeable in the implementation of successful engagement interventions as they play a core role in ensuring the success of an engagement intervention.

4.3 CONTRIBUTION

The contributions of this study towards myself, towards HR practitioners and IO psychology, towards managers and towards organisations will now be discussed.

4.3.1 Contribution of the findings towards myself

I believe this study provided me with greater insight into the HR practitioner's role in the implementation of engagement interventions. It also provided clarity as to why my organisation's engagement survey's (EAS) overall score has declined from 61% to 65%. As a result of the findings and literature review I also know what possible engagement interventions lead to greater engagement and what must be in place for those engagement interventions to be successful.

This study's findings will enable me as a trainee I/O psychologist to identify what engagement interventions may lead to enhanced engagement, and in doing so will lead to me being a better change leader. What surprised me was that even though HR practitioners are supposed to be the champions and at the forefront of leading and implementing engagement interventions within organisations, they may still have a limited understanding of which engagement interventions actually make a positive significant difference. What I have also learnt is that unless an I/O psychologist or HR practitioner gets the backing of management or senior management it will be very difficult for an engagement intervention to succeed, as management play a substantial part in rolling out engagement interventions in their teams, with the support of HR practitioners and I/O psychologists. As a person I feel the study enriched my passion for I/O psychology and provided me with the necessary insight to possibly better organisations through the implementation of engagement interventions that have been proven to make a significant positive difference in bettering engagement.

4.3.2 Contribution of the findings towards HR practitioners & IO psychology

This study is not only relevant or beneficial specifically to HR practitioners and how they experience

engagement interventions but is also beneficial to the I/O psychology community. The reasons for this is that many I/O psychologists today are trapped between their role as traditional HR practitioners and psychologist (Barnard & Fourie, 2007; Benjamin & Louw-Potgieter, 2008). I/O psychologists spend much less of their time doing what they would like to do (preferred activities such a counselling, mentoring and coaching) and this results in an increasing gap between their self-concept and their work-role as an industrial psychologist (Van Zyl et al. 2010). This could ultimately result in disengagement for I/O psychologists (May et al., 2004; Olivier & Rothman, 2007). From the literature above, one can deduce that in many cases I/O psychologists act in a HR practitioner role in their day-to-day activities. As they are seen as leaders in their organisations (Barnard & Fourie, 2007) and primary role models for change, hope and happiness in their organisations (Cameron et al., 2003) it is important they understand and have insight into what makes an engagement intervention successful and what factors can lead to the success of an engagement intervention.

4.3.3 Contribution of the findings towards managers

The findings, I believe, will help managers see how important their roles are in ensuring the successful implementation of engagement interventions. As found in the literature, engagement interventions with an individual-focused approach can fail if senior management fail to take the necessary responsibility when implementing engagement interventions (Giga et al., 2003). Only with the support of managers can HR practitioners successfully implement engagement interventions, provided the organisation embraces the change for the better.

4.3.4 Contribution of findings towards organisations

Organisations should take stock of their engagement interventions and can use these findings to help ensure that their interventions are achieving the desired results. As stated a number of times through this dissertation, engagement has a big influence on bottom-line results, performance and the retention of staff, so it is vital that organisations take cognisance of the fact that engagement is here to stay. More and more organisations are becoming aware of the fact that an engaged workforce is one of the biggest competitive advantages an organisation can have.

4.4 LIMITATIONS

The limitations with regard to the literature review and hermeneutic phenomenological study are discussed below.

4.4.1 Limitations of the literature review

There is a vast amount of literature on engagement as a whole, but literature is very limited on human resources practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

4.4.2 Limitations of the hermeneutic phenomenological study

The researcher focused on one financial institution, which is only one industry. Further to this the research took place in a South African context only. The small size of the sample may mean limited insight was obtained. However, the findings were in line with literature.

As the study was qualitative in nature, the findings cannot be generalised across different contexts but rather provide a sight into this specific phenomenon studied. The researcher was also an employee at the organisation and was used as the tool to conduct the research, which can be limiting. The latter may have had an effect on the information obtained from the interviews as participants may have wanted to represent their knowledge in a more positive light than they would have done in the case of a neutral researcher. However, this risk was mitigated by outlining what the researcher's role was and what the purpose of the interview was.

Further to this, limited research has been done on the HR practitioner's role specifically in implementing engagement interventions, which meant it was difficult to compare the finding of this study to existing studies.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations will now be discussed in terms of the literature review, study and organisation and industrial psychology field.

Recommendations – literature review. The literature review provided insight into engagement, engagement interventions and the HR practitioner's role in the implementation of engagement interventions. However, there was a gap in literature around the HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions on an international and a local (South African) level. Further research needs to explore the experiences of HR practitioners when they implement engagement interventions, in order to obtain further knowledge into what leads to a successful engagement intervention and to further clarify the role of an HR practitioner or Industrial psychologists in the implementation of these engagement interventions.

Recommendations – study and organisation. This study has given the necessary insight into how HR practitioners understand and have experienced engagement and engagement interventions and their specific role in the implementation of these engagement interventions. HR practitioners and I/O psychologists need to be aware of what engagement interventions can address engagement concerns within a company or what engagement interventions will make a significant positive difference within a company. What this research recommends is that when creating or facilitating engagement interventions, the process must involve both employer and employee working together to address engagement. This will allow for greater ownership and accountability and will better ensure the success of the intervention, provided continual attention is put on bettering engagement through interventions. What is recommended is that HR practitioners and I/O psychologist ensure they are continuously aware of what engagement interventions are successful according to literature and that they keep themselves updated in the field of engagement as it is a constantly changing field of study. HR practitioners need to remain as the ‘heart’, ‘the core’, ‘facilitator’, ‘business partner’ or ‘middle man’ when it comes to implementing engagement interventions, and to do this they need to be knowledge experts in the field of engagement and engagement interventions.

Recommendations – industrial psychology field. As many I/O psychologists today may act in an HR practitioner role in their day-to-day activities, and as they are seen as leaders in their organisations (Barnard & Fourie, 2007) and primary role models for change, hope and happiness within their organisations (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), it is important that they also understand and have insight into what makes an engagement intervention successful and what factors can lead to the success of an engagement intervention.

4.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Suggestions will be made for further research in terms of the literature review, study, organisation and industrial psychology field.

Suggestions for further research – literature review. There is gap in research on HR practitioners’ experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution or any other institution. Further research should be conducted in order to add to the body of knowledge of an HR practitioner’s experiences in implementing a successful engagement intervention.

Suggestions for further research – study and organisation. As a result of the sample being quite small, consideration should be given to conducting a similar study of a bigger sample across numerous industries to allow for generalisation of the findings. Research on this topic on an international scale will also be beneficial to the academic and corporate world as this insight can

ultimately better the retention and performance of staff in any organisation today. Also further research should be done on whether social engagements at work could lead to easier communication between employer and employee on the success of engagement interventions as this was indicated as a gap in literature. I would also suggest doing further research on the role HR practitioners play as the 'heart', 'the core', 'facilitator', 'business partner' or 'middle man' in implementing engagement interventions. Further research on the latter may provide insight into whether HR practitioners experience themselves to be central to enhancing engagement through engagement interventions in organisations today.

Suggestions for further research – industrial psychology field. It would be interesting to explore an Industrial psychologist's role and experience when implementing engagement interventions, as Industrial psychologists often work in HR roles today. This is an important field to focus on for further research.

In conclusion, although there are limitations with this study, it does contribute to literature by uniquely exploring HR practitioners' experiences of engagement within a financial institution. This study should provide insight and a better understanding into why certain engagement interventions are successful and lastly provide insight into an HR practitioner's role in the implementation of engagement interventions.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The final chapter focused on the conclusions, limitations and recommendations from both the literature review and the interpretive study. There were several limitations of the study as qualitative inquiry cannot be generalised. It did however provide the necessary insight to answer the research question of HR practitioners' experiences of engagement interventions within a financial institution.

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